



## **NOT ALL DRUGS ARE CREATED EQUALLY**

### **A PARENTS GUIDE TO NEW PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS**

**THIS INFORMATION SHEET HAS BEEN PRODUCED TO PROVIDE A BRIEF GUIDE TO NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (ALSO KNOWN AS LEGAL HIGHS) FOR PARENTS, CARERS & THOSE WHO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE. WE PREFER TO USE THE TERM NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES RATHER THAN "LEGAL HIGHS" AS LEGAL IS SOMETIMES CONFUSED WITH SAFE, WHICH IS A DANGEROUS MISCONCEPTION.**

#### **WHAT ARE NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES?**

These drugs have been designed to evade drug laws, are widely available and have the potential to pose serious risks to public health and safety and can even be fatal. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) (the Government's independent statutory drug advisers) advise that the short-term harms of NPS can include paranoia, psychosis and seizures and that their long-term harms are often unknown. NPS are advertised and sold as 'legal highs', often under a variety of brand names, at low risk and significant reward for suppliers. There has been a rapid increase in the number and range of new substances with greater ease of availability, with their open sale in offline retail outlets and through the global marketplace of the internet. New psychoactive substances are sold under a variety of names, often with no ingredients listed on the packet, so it is very hard to know what is being taken. They often come in brightly coloured packaging, in small clear ziplock bags or in capsule form.

The substances are generally bought, from head shops, from internet sites, through friends or from dealers. Head shops are businesses that target an alternative youth culture, often selling clothes, magazines, "legal highs" & paraphernalia associated with drug taking, such as pipes & bongs.

#### **ARE NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES SAFE?**

No, just because a substance is legal doesn't make it safe. Drugs intended for human consumption must be regulated under the Medicines act & therefore undergo rigorous testing to determine how they can be used safely. New psychoactive substances do not have these safeguards & could be dangerous. Risks may be increased when taken with alcohol or other drugs. These experimental chemicals are called experimental for a reason. It means no one knows what happens if you take them. They are untested on animals & humans. If a young person does end up in hospital because they have had a bad reaction to taking an NPS clinicians will try to help, but because of limited knowledge of how they work they may struggle to provide effective treatment.

### TYPES OF NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Some new psychoactive substances come from plants and are cleverly marketed as being plant based natural highs: suggesting they are more natural and therefore less dangerous than other drugs. This may not be the case as they may be treated with dangerous chemicals that could cause serious side effects. Other new psychoactive substances are known as research chemicals, designer or synthetic drugs. These are drugs created to get around the drug laws, usually by modifying the chemical structure of existing drugs, or by creating a new drug that can produce effects similar to illicit drugs but which can be sold legally.

### WHAT EFFECTS DO NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES HAVE?

Many of these drugs are so new that very little is known about them. They may have depressant, stimulant or hallucinogenic properties, or a combination of these.

Depressants are substances that depress the activity of the central nervous system, slowing down responses, affecting co-ordination and making a person more sleepy.

Stimulants speeds up the central nervous system to increase neural activity in the brain. They tend to increase alertness and activity.

Hallucinogens cause a change in the sensory experience, resulting in hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting or experiencing things that aren't really there.

There is some information on the short term effects which users report. Some of the negative effects seem to be nose bleeds, heart palpitations, or changes in behaviour or personality. They may also cause anxiety, paranoia, overstimulation of the heart and circulatory system and over-excitation of the nervous system, which can cause fits.

### WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Like any new drug, some young people choose to experiment & some continue to use them, but most young people across Cambridgeshire & Peterborough are not taking new psychoactive substances or illegal drugs. It's important to make sure that young people are aware that these products, whether legal or not, ARE NOT SAFE. Parents can help by making sure they have accurate knowledge themselves so they can openly discuss risks with their child.

### IF YOUR CHILD HAS TAKEN SOMETHING

**FIRST** - Ensure their safety: Are they breathing comfortably? Are their lips and fingers warm and pink, or cold and blueish? Can they respond and tell you who they are, who you are, and where they are? If there are any concerns about their physical health CALL AN AMBULANCE or take them straight to A&E.

**SECOND** - Try to find out what they took, when, and how much they took.

**THIRD** - Only at a later stage when they are safe and they have sobered up, invite them to help you understand why they wanted to take these drugs, and whether this is a one-off, or part of a pattern. Keep lines of communication open & make it part of an ongoing conversation around healthy choices & healthy living.

**IF IN DOUBT CALL 999 IMMEDIATELY**

More information, support & advice about specific drugs can be found at [www.angelusfoundation.com](http://www.angelusfoundation.com)  
[www.casus.cpft.nhs.uk](http://www.casus.cpft.nhs.uk) & [www.cambsdaat.org](http://www.cambsdaat.org).



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