



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 (IN THE PAST KNOWN AS LEGAL HIGHS) FOR PARENTS & THOSE WHO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE. WE PREFER TO USE THE TERM NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AS THE LAW HAS NOW MADE IT ILLEGAL TO SUPPLY NPS AND ALSO THAT “LEGAL” IS SOMETIMES CONFUSED WITH SAFE, WHICH IS A DANGEROUS MISCONCEPTION.

WHAT ARE NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AND ARE THEY LEGAL?

These drugs have been designed to evade drug laws but 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.

Originally these drugs were produced to avoid the laws around the misuse of drugs which is why they were often referred to as ‘Legal Highs’. In May 2016 a new law called the Psychoactive Substances Act came into force which made it an offence to produce, supply, offer to supply, possess with intent to supply, import or export (including over the internet) any psychoactive substances. This means it is not against the law for someone to be in possession of NPS, if it is for their own use, but it is illegal for them to give to or sell to others.

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.

ARE NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES SAFE?

No; drugs intended for human consumption must be regulated under the Medicines Act & therefore undergo rigorous testing to determine how they can be used safely. NPS do not have these safeguards & could be dangerous. Risks may be increased when taken with alcohol or other drugs. As these drugs are new and unknown no one knows what happens if someone takes them. They are untested on animals and humans. If a young person does end up in hospital because they have had a bad reaction to taking an NPS they will try to help, but because we have limited knowledge of how they work they may not be able to give 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 originally 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 more commonly known drugs.

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 sleepier.

Stimulants speed 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 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.org.uk www.cpft.nhs.uk/casus & www.cambsdaat.org.

