



## Oasis Partnership Advice Booklet

### Legal Highs: Some FAQ's



## Legal Highs: Some FAQ's

### What is a legal high.

A legal high is a drug ( a substance taken to produce an altered state of mind) that is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act and is therefore legal to possess. (sometimes known as research chemicals)



However legal high can be a misleading term because most of the substances are regulated by the Medicines Act, which makes it illegal to sell, supply or advertise them for human consumption.

The substances are generally bought from head shops or from internet sites. Many suppliers use descriptions such as bath salts, incense or plant food. They claim these substances are 'not intended for human consumption' as a way of getting around the drug laws.

Legal highs are sold under a variety of names, often with no ingredients listed on the packet, so it is very hard to know what you are taking. As more legal highs become controlled, the term is still used by the public to describe substances that were either recently made illegal or are legal. Officially newly controlled chemicals are known as **Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS)**.

**Research chemicals** - essentially these are legal highs. They are chemicals that are used in laboratories for scientific research but have sought-after effect.



## Plant based legal highs

Some legal highs come from plants. They are cleverly marketed as being plant based natural highs – something more natural and therefore less harmful than other drugs, which may not be the case.

These could be treated with dangerous chemicals and can have potentially serious side effects.

## Synthetic Drugs

Other legal highs are known as 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.

More than 90 substances have been recorded since 1997.



## What is a head shop?

A head shop is a shop that sells drug paraphernalia, eg equipment (pipes and bongs) for smoking cannabis, as well as recreational drugs that are legal to sell (though not legal to sell for human consumption). These shops may also sell clothes and magazines designed to appeal to young people who identify with this subculture.

While head shops may claim they are not selling these drugs for human consumption, they sell them alongside drug-taking paraphernalia, which suggests otherwise.

There has been an increase in the number of head shops opening and the internet remains a popular place to buy legal highs and is a place to learn about the effects of legal highs both good and bad.



## **How do legal highs affect the body?**

Because these drugs are so new, very little is known about them. There is some information on the short term effects which users report on websites. Some of the negative effects seem to be nose bleeds, heart palpitations, circulation problems and changes in behaviour and personality.

Some of these drugs are stimulants and therefore carry the same risks to those associated with cocaine and ecstasy, including heart problems, fits and seizures.

Because the production of these drugs is not regulated, what is sold under a given name one week may turn out to have a different chemical makeup the next week, so the effects on the body are unpredictable.

Another concern is that people who use legal highs are very likely to be mixing them with alcohol, illicit drugs and prescription drugs, and we just don't know the effects on the body of mixing these substances.

## **What is the Government doing about legal highs?**

On 23 December 2009, following advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, the Government banned 3 substances used as legal highs – Spice, GBL and BZP – under the Misuse of Drugs Act. As of 16th April 2010, mephedrone and its related compounds have been banned in the UK and classified as Class B under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

These substances continue to be available for sale in a variety of guises on the internet.

## **What are the societal costs of legal high use?**

Analysis of the unit costs to services dealing with overdose has been undertaken (with a large proportion being linked to alcohol consumption alongside substance misuse). These costs include ambulance call outs, A&E admissions, hospital bed occupations and outpatient treatment and highlight the need for preventative campaigns around this growing issue. On average the following costs can apply;

- The average cost of an emergency ambulance call out is £244.00
- The average cost of an A & E attendance is £100.00
- The average cost per night to occupy a hospital bed is £569.00
- The average cost of treatment provided per visit is £112.00

Therefore we can estimate a cost of approx. £1,025 per person if all of the above

is required. For just one night. The majority of admissions for legal highs require at least one night occupying a bed whilst effects subside therefore this would be a minimum cost. This does not include the costs if the individual requires treatment from substance misuse services.

### **How many deaths are linked to legal highs?**

A report for the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths revealed 43 people in the UK died after taking legal highs in 2010, compared with 5 in 2009.

### **What are the effects of legal highs and alcohol?**

Alcohol is a depressant. This means it slows down the nervous system which controls the heart and breathing rate. Mixing alcohol with any drug, including legal ones, can seriously upset your body. You increase the risk to yourself if you combine alcohol with any legal or illegal substance that causes a high, including the risk of death.

### **What help is available locally?**

You should talk to our local GP if you are experiencing health problems that you think are associated to your use of legal highs.

By the end April 2013, over 120 professionals working across Buckinghamshire will have attended a 1 day training event, aimed at raising awareness of the issues with legal highs. Bucks DAAT have recently commissioned 6 x 1day legal high training days, run by Tony D'Agostino.

You can get help from Oasis or :

SMART service offer an Open Access drop in service for advice and information.

Addaction provides the young peoples service across Buckinghamshire. See the **Links page** on the **Oasis Partnership website** for contact details.

Following assessment, Oasis offers a range of support options that will help service users to address their legal high use. This includes one to one support, group work opportunities and therapeutic interventions such as counselling.

The Oasis recovery network offers support alongside and on completion of treatment, focusing on service users other needs such as housing issues, employment and training support and confidence/ relationship building.