

The Highs and Lows of



New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Here's what you need to know

NPS Information



This information sheet has been produced in response to requests from parents/carers and those working with young people to provide details on the issue of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), previously known as legal highs. This information sheet was developed using a wide range of sources and has been updated since the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, which made it an offence to produce, supply, offer to supply, possess with intent to supply, possess on custodial premises, import or export psychoactive substances; that is, any substance intended for human consumption that is capable of producing a psychoactive effect.

What are NPS?

NPS are substances which seek to mimic the effects of drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy. NPS used to be called 'legal highs', which was a very misleading term as many of the chemicals included in these substances were illegal. Many suppliers described the products they produced as things like; bath salts, incense or plant food. Since the change of law in May 2016, it is now illegal to supply any NPS for human consumption. This includes selling them or giving them away free, even to friends. Some young people get their NPS from their friends, so there are implications around dealing which can be very complex. Importing NPS from abroad is also a crime.



Police will take action where they find people committing these offences. Punishments can include up to 7 years in prison.

Police and other agencies also have new powers which mean they will be able to stop and search people they think are supplying and they will seize and destroy NPS where they find them.

Drugs that are already illegal, such as cocaine, ecstasy, heroin and other substances classified under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, are not affected by these changes to the law. It is already a crime to have these drugs in your possession and police will continue to take action when they find these substances as before. Some NPS also contain these drugs so young people can never be entirely sure what is in their possession.

NPS have been sold under a variety of names, often with no ingredients listed on the packet, so it is very hard for a person to know what they were taking. This makes NPS extremely dangerous, as people had no idea what they were putting into their bodies.

Plant based NPS

Some NPS come from plants. They were cleverly marketed as being plant based natural highs which make them sound more natural and people have been misled into thinking that they were less harmful than other drugs. This is not actually true as these drugs could also be treated with dangerous chemicals and have potentially serious side effects.

Whilst being under the influence of a 'natural high' or 'herbal high' such as salvia, a person may choose to do something they would never normally choose to do. This choice could affect the rest of their lives in a very negative way.

Synthetic drugs

These were drugs created to get around the previous drug laws, usually by modifying the chemical structure of drugs classified as illegal under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, or by creating a new drug that can produce effects similar to other illegal drugs.

Cathinones are 'cousins' of the amphetamine family of drugs, which includes amphetamine itself (speed) and MDMA (ecstasy), which have similar effects. Cathinones, such as mephedrone and methylone were sold online and in headshops as so called 'legal highs' until they became Class B drugs in April 2010.

If the police catch someone with illegal drugs, they'll always take some action. This could include a formal caution, arrest and prosecution.

Variations of NPS are being produced all the time, each with their own set of effects, more information about individual drugs can be found at www.talktofrank.com

What is a head shop?

A head shop is a shop that sells drug paraphernalia, e.g. equipment (pipes and bongs) for smoking cannabis, although cannabis, and now all NPS are illegal substances. These shops may also sell magazines and clothes designed to appeal to young people who identify with this culture.

The internet remains a popular place for young people to learn more about the effects of NPS and how to take them.

Are lots of young people using NPS?

Like any new drug, some young people choose to try them and some continue to use them but **most young people in Northumberland are not using NPS or taking other illegal drugs.**



Are NPS safe?

No! Drugs intended for human consumption must be regulated under the Medicines Act 2012, and therefore undergo rigorous testing to determine how they can be used safely. NPS are not tested in this way; they contain substances that **are not meant for human consumption**.

NPS are illegal to sell, supply or advertise for human consumption because of their effects on the body. This means that if a person chooses to put these drugs into their body, they are taking a real risk with their health.

How do NPS 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 have reported on websites. Some of the negative effects seem to be nosebleeds, heart palpitations, limbs turning blue, or changes in behaviour or personality.

Because the production of these drugs is illegal, the recipes for them change all the time. What is sold under a given name one week may turn out to have a different chemical make-up the next week, so the effects on the body are very unpredictable. **If you are at all concerned about anyone who has taken NPS, take them to Accident and Emergency.**

Another concern is that people who use NPS may be likely to be mixing them with alcohol. This is very dangerous because alcohol is a depressant, which means it slows down the central nervous system which controls the heart and breathing. Mixing alcohol with any drug, including medicines, can seriously damage the body. Mixing alcohol with another depressant could shut the body down altogether. Combining alcohol with stimulant drugs is not a good idea either as this can cause confusion to the body and mind, leading people to do things they wouldn't normally choose to do, like drinking a lethal amount of alcohol.

What help is available locally?

All young people in Northumberland can access help, advice and support by contacting SORTED, the young people's substance misuse service, on **01670 500150** or **0800 6335872** website: www.sortednorth.co.uk

Parents/carers and young people can also access help from the Talk to Frank website at www.talktofrank.com or via the Talk to Frank helpline on **0300 1236600**



What can you do as a parent/carer?

It is important to make sure that children and young people are aware that NPS are **NOT** safe. This creates a vital role for parents and carers.

Here are some strategies that may help parents and carers to have conversations about drugs with their children:

- Have positive expectations - expect the best from your children, not the worst.
- Listen carefully - find the time and space to listen to and talk with your child. Find out what they know, what they want to know and if they've got any worries.
- Reassure your child that the majority of young people in Northumberland are not using illegal or illicit substances.
- Establish a clear family position on drugs. Explain that drugs are dangerous and because you care about your children, you don't want them to take drugs.
- Give lots of praise - young people with really good self-esteem are less likely to misuse drugs.
- Establish clear rules about right and wrong behaviour - children do look to parents for acceptable limits and boundaries.
- Although there is no set age for starting to talk about drugs, research shows that 9 years old is a time young people like to experiment with a range of activities, so children from that age need to understand that drugs are dangerous. As they grow older you can be more specific about different drugs.
- Repeat your messages when you can - but in a way that makes sense to your child. Use every day experiences and issues raised on television to bring the subject into your conversations.
- If you are worried that your child has taken an NPS and is having a bad reaction, take them to A & E.
- If you are concerned that your child needs some support around their drug or alcohol use, please contact SORTED, there is always someone there during office hours that you can talk to, or leave a message on their answer machine and someone will ring you back.

Remember most young people in Northumberland are not using NPS or taking other illegal drugs.

