

Training around 'Legal' Highs



UNDERSTANDING
THE EFFECTS



HOW TO HELP
THOSE HAVING A BAD
REACTION



WHERE TO GO FOR
FURTHER GUIDANCE
AND INFORMATION

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'Legal' Highs

Just because a drug is legal, it doesn't mean it's safe. Produced quickly and without safety tests, you never know the risks you are taking. This training module explores the world of 'legal' highs...

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'Legal highs' contain one or more chemical substances which produce similar effects to illegal drugs.

These new substances are not yet controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and there is often not enough research about them to know about their potency, adverse effects from human consumption, or when used with other substances or alcohol.

However, more and more 'legal highs' are being researched to see what their dangers are and to see whether they should be made illegal. In fact, many substances that have been found in substances sold as 'legal highs' have already been made illegal.

Just the fact that a substance is sold as 'legal' doesn't mean that it's safe or legal. People can't really be sure of what's in a 'legal high' that they have bought, or been given, or what effect it's likely to have. It is not unusual for the drug to be cut to add extra bulk to make the dealer more money - what is listed on the packaging may not be the full contents! Many 'legal highs' are sold under brand names like 'Clockwork Orange', 'Bliss', 'Mary Jane' and have been directly linked to poisoning, emergency hospital admissions including in mental health services and, in some cases, deaths.

Other names include:

Plant Food, NPS, New Psychoactive Substances, MDAT, Eric 3, Bath Salts.

Street Names include:

Gogaine, Pandora's Box Unleashed, Cherry Bomb, Clockwork Orange, China White, Bliss and Mary Jane

'Legal highs' cannot be sold for human consumption so they are often sold as incense, salts or plant food to get round the law. The packaging may describe a list of ingredients but you cannot be sure that this is what the product will contain.



The main effects of almost all 'psychoactive' drugs, including 'legal highs', can be described using three main categories:

- stimulants (like mephedrone and naphyrone which are now banned)
- 'downers' or sedatives (like synthetic cannabinoids which are now banned)
- psychedelics or hallucinogens (like NBOMe drugs which are now banned)

Whilst drugs in each of the categories will have similarities in the kinds of effects they produce, they will have widely different strengths and effects on different people.

- **Stimulant 'legal highs'** act like amphetamines ('speed'), cocaine, or ecstasy, in that they can make people feel energised, physically active, fast-thinking, very chatty and euphoric. They can make people feel overconfident and disinhibited, induce feelings of anxiety, panic, confusion, paranoia, and even cause psychosis, which can lead to putting own safety at risk. This type of drugs can put a strain on the heart and nervous system. They may give the immune system a battering, possibly causing more colds, flu and sore throats. People may feel quite low for a while after they have stopped using them.
- **'Downer' or sedative 'legal highs'** act similarly to cannabis, benzodiazepines (drugs like diazepam or Valium), or GHB/ GBL, in that they can make people feel euphoric, relaxed or sleepy. They can reduce inhibitions and concentration, slow down reactions and make people feel lethargic, forgetful or physically unsteady, increasing the risk of accidents. This type of drugs can also cause unconsciousness, coma and death, particularly when mixed with alcohol and/or with other 'downer' drugs. Some people feel very anxious soon after they stop taking 'downers', and if a severe withdrawal syndrome develops in heavy drug users, it can be particularly dangerous and may need medical treatment.





- **Psychedelic or hallucinogenic ‘legal highs’** act like LSD, magic mushrooms, ketamine and methoxetamine. They create altered perceptions and can make people hallucinate (seeing and/or hearing things that aren’t there). They can induce feelings of euphoria, warmth, ‘enlightenment’ and being detached from the world around. Some psychedelic drugs create strong dissociative effects, which make people feel like mind and body are separated. They can cause confusion, panics and strong hallucinatory reactions (‘bad trips’), and their effects can make users behave erratically and put personal safety at serious risk – including from self-harm. Some psychedelic drugs create strong dissociative effects, which make people feel like mind and body are separated. Both of which can interfere with judgement, increasing the risk of acting carelessly or dangerously, and of hurting oneself, particularly in an unsafe environment.

Web Site / YouTube Video:

www.talktofrank.com (most of the information in this module is from Talk to Frank)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9bjK7fWA1I> - BBC Scotland programme on legal highs (well worth a watch to help with understanding)

Within your role as a volunteer you may come across people who have taken drugs or 'legal' highs - if they are having a bad reaction this is general guidance to help them:

If someone is having a bad time on drugs they may be:

- anxious,
- tense
- panicky,
- overheated and dehydrated,
- drowsy
- having difficulty with breathing

The first things you should do are:

- Stay calm,
- Calm them and be reassuring. Don't scare them or chase after them.
- Try to find out what they've taken
- Stay with them



If they are anxious, tense or panicky you should:

- Sit them in a quiet and calm room.
- Keep them away from crowds, bright lights and loud noises.
- Tell them to take slow deep breaths.
- Stay with them

If they are really drowsy you should:

- Sit them in a quiet place and keep them awake,

If they don't respond or become unconscious call an ambulance immediately and place them in the recovery position.

- Don't scare them, shout at them or shock them,
- Don't give them coffee to wake them up,

If they are unconscious or having difficulty breathing you should:

- Immediately phone for an ambulance,
- Place them into the recovery position,
- Stay with them until the ambulance arrives,
- If you know what drug they've taken tell the ambulance crew, this can help make sure that they get the right treatment straight away.