

Harm Reduction Advice

Below are some suggestions on how to minimise harm.

The only way to avoid all risks completely is not to take any drugs.

Remember drugs that look the same or that are in the same packaging may not actually be the same as something you have taken before so therefore the effects may be very different.

Start low and go slow – especially if you are taking a drug which you have never used before. And remember that different drugs act at different speeds – redosing (taking more too soon) could lead to an overdose.

Mixing any drug with another drug (including alcohol, prescribed and over the counter medicines) increases the risk of serious side effects.

If you are going to take any type of drug try to make sure that you have friends around you – people you trust to take care of you if things go wrong – look after each other!

If you, or a friend, have any worrying symptoms or side effects call an ambulance straight away.
(Please see what to do in an emergency)

Keep hydrated – drink plenty of water but avoid alcohol as it causes dehydration. Also, avoid energy drinks as they contain lots of caffeine which can increase the strain on the heart.

Carry condoms so that you don't have unprotected sex.

Advice for Family Members:

If you are concerned that someone close to you is using NPS (legal highs):

DO

- Remember that this is about your concern for their health and wellbeing it's not about punishing bad behaviour.
- Get your facts - gather as much information as you can about the drug or drugs they are using - you don't need to be an expert but it does help to be more confident about the subject matter.
- Come from a place of love and concern, not anger.
- Keep a cool head and speak calmly - try not to shout.
- Don't jump to conclusions or make judgements too soon about them or their friends - talk some **but listen more** so that hopefully they will then feel that they can be more open.

DONT

- Just take what they say at face value - listen to their tone of voice, and pay attention to their facial expressions, and body language - read between the lines too.
- Get distracted (e.g. by answering the phone or door) or walk away/give up if you feel you are getting nowhere - give them your undivided attention and try to understand their point of view.

The most important thing to remember is that there is help and support available for **YOU** regardless of whether the person you are worried about is ready to get help or not. You can also attend services together as a family. And if you fear for your own, or that of the wider family's safety at any point, please do call the Police as they will also be able to link you and your relative with appropriate support services. *See the following sections for how you can get in touch with people that can help.*

When and where to seek help

Most problems with short-term or recreational use of 'legal highs,' as with illegal drugs, will settle after you stop taking them and/or have allowed time for the drugs to get out of your system. However if you, or someone you know, feel that you are having a serious negative reaction after having taken a 'legal high' – or indeed another type of, or combination of, drugs – go to the accident and emergency department of your closest local hospital and be as open and honest as you can with the staff in relation to what you have taken, in what quantities and over what time period.

Get Support

If you find that you are using these substances on a more regular basis, and that you are having more and more issues and problems as a result, then please seek specialist support. Your GP can refer you on to services or you can also contact them directly – for advice or to make an appointment. A list of services for Belfast, and all the other Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) areas of Northern Ireland, can be found in the 'Publications' section of the Public Health Agency's website:

www.publichealth.hscni.net

If you, or someone else is in distress or despair, Lifeline's counsellors are available to talk to over the phone 24 hours per day, 7 days a week: **contact Lifeline on 0800 808 8000**

More information on 'Legal highs'

- New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) can be found by visiting:

www.knowthescore.info

www.mylegalhigh.org

www.drugscope.org.uk

Where can I get support?

Below are some suggested services for information and support operating in Belfast:

Addiction NI	Adults, Families & Older People	028 9066 4434
DAISY(Start360)	Youth, Young Adults & Families	028 9043 5815
Drug Outreach Team	Injecting Drug users	028 9504 1433
Dunlewey Addiction Services	Adults and Gambling	028 9061 1162
Falls Community Council	Youth, Adults & Families	028 9020 2030
FASA	Youth, Adults & Families	028 9080 3040
ASCERT	Youth, Adults & Families	0800 254 5123

"Working together to reduce substance related harm"

HSC Public Health Agency

Cast
COMMUNITY ACTION SUPPORT TEAM
for Drugs & Alcohol

FASA
The Agency at the Heart of the Community

ASCERT

NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

(LEGAL HIGHS)

INFORMATION, GUIDANCE & ADVICE

NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION

What are NPS? (legal highs)

'Legal highs' are substances which have been designed to mimic or copy the effects of illegal drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy, cannabis, LSD and benzodiazepines (benzos).

Although the people, shops and websites selling these products market them as legal that doesn't mean that they are safe, or that they have been tested, or were ever intended for human consumption. It simply means that they are so new that they haven't as yet been declared illegal to use, possess and/or supply.

What is the legal status of NPS?

The UK Government has introduced legislation allowing a drug/substance to be banned temporarily (for 12 months) to allow time to investigate and decide whether it should be controlled permanently (under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971). More and more substances that were previously sold as 'legal highs' have since been banned by the government examples being Spice, mephedrone, naphyrone, methoxetamine, NBOMe, benzofuran, etc.

Police have the power to stop, question, arrest and confiscate regardless of whether you are in possession of a so-called 'legal high.' In some instances products which have been sold as 'legal highs' upon testing have in fact been found to contain illegal substances meaning that you could actually face prosecution.

"There is always a real risk that you could in fact be breaking the law – and worse still that you are going to take something which is potentially lethal"



What are they sold as?

'NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION' is very clearly marked on many of these products as suppliers AREN'T actually allowed to sell them unless they have been rigorously tested and adhere to either Medicine or Food Safety standards and legislation – which of course they don't. Those selling 'legal highs' market them as a variety of products such as:

- **Research chemicals/ Chemical reagents**
- **Party pills**
- **Herbal highs/ Herbal ecstasy/ Herbal incense/ Herbal remedies**
- **Air fresheners/ Room odourisers**
- **Bath salts/ Plant food/ Pond cleaner**

They can be sold as powder, crystals, pills, capsules, seeds and liquids nearly always in brightly coloured packaging with creative product brand names. It is also important to realise that in many instances the supplier is just as ignorant as the buyer about what is actually in the products they are selling!

One chemical found in 'legal highs' marketed at the time as 'speckled cherries or crosses' has since been implicated by the Northern Ireland Coroner's Office in 18 deaths in 2013 (NB in all of these fatalities more than one substance was involved).

What are the effects and risks?

The effects vary due to the fact that 'legal highs' are designed to mimic a wide range of existing drugs. As a general rule, users can expect that the short to medium terms effects might be similar to the effects usually produced by the illegal drug that the product has been designed to mimic. However, the chemicals in the products are constantly changing so you can never be sure about what you are taking or what the strength and effects will be - even if you have taken that branded product before.

The risks of taking 'legal highs' are significant. Their newness means that, to date, there has been very little research into the long term effects.

Reported risks include:

- **Reduced inhibitions**
- **Excited or paranoid states**
- **Temporary psychotic states and unpredictable behaviours**
- **Confusion leading to aggression**
- **Intense comedowns which impact on mental health**
- **Sudden increases in body temp & heart rate**
- **Drowsiness**
- **Coma seizures and even death**

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR:

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

- Anxious
- Tense
- Panicky
- Overheated and dehydrated
- Drowsy, or
- Having difficulty with breathing

WHAT TO DO:

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
- Don't put them in a cold bath to "wake them up" – this wastes time and there's a risk of drowning

If they are unconscious or having difficulty breathing you should:

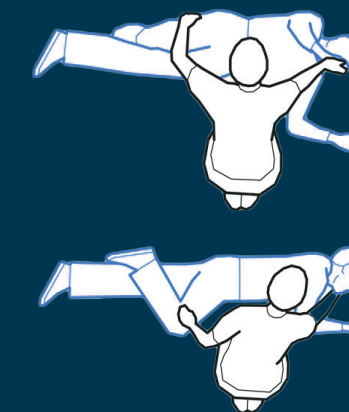
- Immediately phone for an ambulance and place them into the recovery position
- Stay with them until the ambulance arrives, and if you know what drug(s) they've taken tell the ambulance crew, this can help make sure that they get the right treatment straight away



RECOVERY POSITION

By placing someone in the recovery position, you're making sure that they are still breathing and can breathe easily, as it's not unusual for someone who has become unconscious to swallow their tongue. You're also making sure that if they vomit that it won't block their airway and choke them.

1. Open their airway by tilting the head and lifting their chin. Lie them on their side and straighten their legs.
2. Place the arm nearest to you at right angles to the body. Get hold of the far leg just above the knee and pull it up, keeping the foot flat on the ground. Place their other hand against their cheek.



3. Keep their hand pressed against their cheek and pull on the upper leg to roll them towards you and onto their side.
4. Tilt the head back so they can breathe easily.
5. Make sure that both the hip and the knee of the upper leg are bent at right angles.

