

Psychoactive Substances Bill

Fact sheet: Prevention, Treatment and Interventions Response to New Psychoactive Substances

Overview

1. New psychoactive substances (NPS) pose a substantial risk to young people. The emergence of NPS and the limited information around them and their harms has posed challenges to government, local authorities, education, healthcare services and the Criminal Justice System.
2. The Home Office commissioned an Expert Panel in December 2013 to review the UK's legislative approach to NPS. The Panel's report was published in October 2014. The Expert Panel recognised the value in the current approach and made a number of legislative and non-legislative recommendations on how this could be enhanced. The non-legislative recommendations covered prevention, treatment, intervention and information sharing which were all agreed by the Government. This fact sheet focuses on action taken to enhance the UK approach towards prevention, treatment and interventions and builds on the Government's 2010 Drugs Strategy.

Prevention response to NPS

3. The Government is reducing the demand for drugs by preventing use in the first place and intervening early with those that do develop problems by providing a broad range of evidence-based prevention approaches, which have a positive impact on young people and adults, giving them the confidence, resilience and risk management skills to resist drug use, including NPS. Approaches include educating the public, especially young people, and targeting specific NPS user groups about the risks associated with NPS with targeted, consistent and evidence-based messaging.
4. There is a broad range of educational material on drugs and NPS in particular available which is tailored to different audiences. For example, the Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Information Service¹ (ADEPIS) provides practical advice and tools based on the best international evidence and Public Health England² (PHE) has launched "Rise Above", a campaign designed to help young people build resilience holistically across a number of health and well-being topics, including stances on drugs and smoking. This campaign aims to build young people's resilience and empower them to make positive choices about a range of health issues.
5. FRANK³ is the national drug information service which is jointly established by the Department of Health and Home Office. The FRANK service is used to engage young people (particularly of school age) and supports them in

¹ <http://mentor-adepis.org/legal-highs-and-novel-psychoactive-substances-nps/>

² <http://riseabove.org.uk/>

³ <http://www.talktofrank.com/>

considering the risks, consequences and harms associated with NPS. It does this by providing targeted and accurate information and advice about drugs. The service's messaging on NPS risks and trends is regularly updated to reflect new forensic, toxicology and social science evidence about NPS, as well as the latest Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' advice on harms.

6. The Home Office has also employed targeted communications campaigns to raise young people's awareness of the risks of using NPS and Home Office ministers write annually to festival organisers to ensure that drug misuse issues, including NPS, remains at the forefront of festival organisers' minds and that appropriate action is put into place, such as a "no legal highs" policy. This has seen positive results in recent years.
7. In response to the NPS Expert Panel review⁴, the Home Office committed to develop a NPS resource pack for informal educators and frontline practitioners to support them in prompting young people to consider the risks, consequences and harms associated with NPS use. The pack, published in March 2015⁵, was created alongside drug treatment partners. Written for those working with young people, the pack includes: facts and information about NPS; case studies on working with young people who use NPS; resources to help start conversations about NPS with young people; and references for further help and information. The pack was disseminated to professionals including youth and social workers, teachers and probation services working with young people and others to support the messages of the targeted NPS communications campaigns.
8. The National Offender Management Service has begun a communications campaign for staff, offenders and prison visitors to help raise awareness and understanding of the risks of NPS.

Health response to NPS

9. The NPS Expert Panel found that the emergence of NPS and the limited information around these substances had implications for the delivery of health treatment and interventions.
10. In November 2014, PHE published a new toolkit⁶ to help local areas prevent and respond to NPS use. The toolkit gives a broad overview of the challenges and provides commissioners with resources and advice to inform a suitable local response.
11. In relation to NPS use, specialist drug treatment services can largely adapt current approaches to existing drugs. NPS users are more likely to present to A&E departments, primary care or mental health services with acute NPS-related problems (for example, agitation, palpitations and seizures).
12. A multi-disciplinary group of experts, funded by the Health Foundation, responded to the emerging threat of NPS by developing evidence-based clinical

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-psychoactive-substances-review-report-of-the-expert-panel>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-psychoactive-substances-nps-resource-pack>

⁶ <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/nps-a-toolkit-for-substance-misuse-commissioners.pdf>

guidelines through Project NEPTUNE. The guidance⁷ was published on 27 March 2015 and was developed to improve clinical practice when treating people who present to health services having taken 'club drugs' or NPS. This is aimed at clinicians working in a range of frontline settings, such as hospitals, sexual health services, primary care and drug treatment services. The project now moves on to Phase II and will develop on-line learning and clinical tools. PHE is committed to using its networks and other resources to share the findings and advice of Project NEPTUNE.

Information Sharing

13. In its response to the Expert Panel, the Government acknowledged the importance for information on NPS to be shared systematically at both a local and national level in a timely manner to ensure that our response and that of other organisations are informed by the best available and most up to date information⁸.
14. The Forensic Early Warning System (FEWS) continues to identify NPS in the UK and support law enforcement action with the latest intelligence on new suppliers of NPS. FEWS is reviewing its dissemination policy with a view to sharing its findings from its collection plans more widely in the course of the year which now includes information and data from a drug clinic and prisons. It already publishes an annual report⁹.

Guidance

15. The Government is continuing to produce guidance to support law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities to address the challenges that NPS pose for those working in this field. The Home Office has worked with the Crown Prosecution Service to update and re-issue its guidance on drug offences including controlled NPS and together with the police to update their enforcement guidance on NPS.
16. The Home Office has also updated its guidance for local authorities¹⁰ on taking action against 'head shops' selling NPS, which now includes new powers under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

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⁷ <http://neptune-clinical-guidance.co.uk/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/response-to-expert-panel-report-on-the-new-psychoactive-substances-review>

⁹ The latest report is available
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/344551/2014-08-12_-FEWS_Annual_Report_Aug_2014_-_Final_2_.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/action-against-head-shops>