

LEGAL HIGHS, PARTY DRUGS AND ALCOHOL FACTSHEET

WHAT IS A LEGAL HIGH?

A legal high is a drug which is taken to produce an altered state of mind that is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

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 purchased from internet sites. They are usually marketed as bath salts, incense, room odourisers or plant food.

Legal highs are sold under a variety of names and often the ingredients will not be listed on the packaging. It is very hard to know what you are taking. These substances are often referred to as research chemicals.

WHAT IS A HEAD SHOP?

A Head Shop is a retail outlet that sells drug paraphernalia and equipment such as pipes and bongs for smoking cannabis, art, magazines and clothes. They may also sell 'legal highs' or research chemicals. Owners of head shops claim that they are selling these products for use as plant fertilisers or bath salts but the fact they can be purchased alongside drug taking equipment is of concern.

The internet is an easy and popular route for the purchasing of legal highs. Users can also obtain information online on how to use these substances and what the likely effects of use might be.

WHAT ARE THE LIKELY EFFECTS ON THE BODY?

Because these drugs are so new, and because they are changing all the time, very little is known about them. We have some information about the possible short term effects that users report. Some of the negative effects include:

- Nose bleeds
- Heart palpitations
- Limbs turning blue
- Changes in behaviour or personality
- Severe confusion
- Terror and panic
- Nausea and vomiting (sometimes loss of bowel control)
- Sleeplessness
- Anxiety

Some legal highs can cause psychosis and dependency.

Because of the unregulated nature of these substances, a drug that is consumed this week without adverse effect may, under the same name, have a different chemical make up the next week. Nobody can assume that any new compound is in any way 'safe' to use recreationally. There is no way of predicting a) what the substance is or b) what the likely effects on the body might be.

ALCOHOL

Young people might be naturally curious about alcohol, or they might experience peer pressure to start drinking before they're ready. Life is all about making choices and it's important to learn about the risks, as well as the benefits, associated with drinking alcohol. If people choose to drink, here are some facts they should know.

Drinking outside, or being outside when drunk increases the chances of having an **accident** or falling asleep outdoors and **freezing to death** (hypothermia).

Large amounts taken quickly can cause **alcohol poisoning** (painful and dangerous). **Very drunk** people **fall asleep** and can **choke on** their own vomit.

Further information and advice for parents/carers and young people about keeping safe if drinking alcohol can be found at:

www.drinksarter.org

www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

www.getthelowdown.co.uk

MIXING DRUGS AND ALCOHOL:

Mixing any drugs (including alcohol) is extremely dangerous. Many drugs can mask the effect of alcohol. Some may make you dehydrated and alcohol can make this worse.

Many people who choose to use legal highs will also be consuming alcohol, illegal drugs or prescription drugs. Because of the uncertainty around what is in a legal high there is no way of predicting what the effect of mixing substances might be.

SPIKING

Sometimes drinks can be spiked with other substances such as rohypnol or sedatives (commonly referred to as date rape drugs). Young people should be made aware of this risk and always keep their drink in sight to safeguard against spiking. If people feel that their drink has been spiked they must tell someone they trust. If a friend collapses and they think their drink may have been spiked they should phone for an ambulance and stay with them until help arrives.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.youngscotextra.org/articles/mixing-drugs-and-alcohol>

<http://choicesforlifeonline.org>

If you or someone you know wish to talk to someone for advice or information call the Know the Score Helpline 24/7 on 0800 587 5879

WHAT CAN PARENTS AND CARERS DO?

It is important that young people are aware that these products – despite being labelled as legal – are not safe. Parents and carers have a vital role in this. They should make sure that their own knowledge about legal highs is accurate and as up-to-date as possible so that they can discuss them with their child and make their child aware of the possible risks.

Some tips to help with this are –

1. Listen carefully to your child. Find the time and space to listen and talk with them – find out what they know and what, if any, worries they may have.
2. Young people often think that they know more than they do. So do some adults! If you don't know, say so! And then suggest that you find out together!
3. Reassure your child that it's OK not to take drugs – often young people feel that they have to try drugs and alcohol to be part of the crowd or be seen to fit in.
4. Try to establish a clear family position on drug and alcohol use. Explain the dangers and the reasons you have for not wanting them to experiment. Ask their views on news stories or TV story lines involving drugs or alcohol.
5. Praising your child will help to boost their self esteem and will encourage them to continue making good choices with their health. Always have positive expectations – always expect the best and not the worst.
6. Make sure you have clear rules about right and wrong behaviour
7. Repeat the messages whenever you can – listen carefully and find the time and space to talk with your child!
8. There is no set age for beginning to talk about drugs and alcohol but there are cases of very young children being offered these substances. Primary school aged children should know about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and this information can be built on as they grow older.

More information can be found at:

www.knowthescore

www.crew2000.org.uk

<http://choicesforlifeonline.org>



Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership.