

Message from the Director of Public Health for Hampshire, Dr Sallie Bacon, and from the Police & Crime Commissioner, Michael Lane: New Psychoactive Substances (“Legal Highs”) - Recent Overdoses within Hampshire and New Legislation

Dear Parents

Many of you will be aware of recent press coverage concerning new psychoactive substances (or so-called “legal highs”) and, in particular, a cluster of over-doses in the Winchester area involving a new psychoactive substance known as “spice.”

This message is intended to raise awareness of the health risks associated with the use of new psychoactive substances (“NPS”) and to make parents and pupils aware of new legislation making the sale, supply and importing of all such substances illegal. There is no intended suggestion that any specific group of pupils either at your own school or elsewhere are involved in the use or supply of psychoactive substances.

Risks to Health

The terms “new psychoactive substances” and “legal highs” refer to broad range of chemical substances, which are intended to produce a psychoactive effect when ingested and the majority of which, until recently, were not controlled by legislation. The lack of legislative control has led to the popular, but **wholly inaccurate, misconception that these substances are safe to use**. In fact the production of these products is entirely unregulated with no controls over the nature or consistency of the chemicals used. Testing has previously shown some NPS products to contain class A and B controlled drugs as well as chemicals known to be toxic. NPS use was linked to at least 67 deaths last year.

Over the past three weeks there have been 11 non-fatal overdoses requiring emergency medical treatment in the Winchester area resulting from use of the new psychoactive substance known as “spice” (intended to mimic the effects of cannabis). At least two of these incidents involved the ‘branded’ spice products “Sweet Leaf” and “Bubblegum” which were purchased from a shop in Southampton. In the other incidences, the spice had been supplied locally. All the victims required emergency medical treatment.

People are advised not to use any NPS product, particularly any spice product (including those branded as ‘Sweet Leaf’ or ‘Bubblegum’) whether purchased from a shop, from an internet supplier or supplied by a friend or associate. Any such products can be handed in anonymously to your local police station.

New Legislation

In addition to the health risks associated with NPS use, the introduction of the Psychoactive Substances Act on Thursday, 26th May, means that anyone supplying, offering to supply or importing any psychoactive substance may be at risk of prosecution and could face a jail sentence of up to seven years and a fine of up to £10,000. Under the Act, supplying includes sharing products with friends whether or not any money changes hands and importing includes any on-line purchase where the supplier is based outside of the UK.

Further Information & Advice

Additional general information is available at www.talktofrank.com (tel: 0300 123 6600)

If you are concerned about anyone’s use of NPS (or any other substance), you should contact:

Inclusion Recovery Hampshire www.inclusion.org/inclusion-recovery-hampshire/

(e-mail: Inclusionhants@sssft.nhs.uk , tel: 0300 124 0103)

Catch 22 (Young Persons Service) www.catch-22.org.uk/programmes-services/hampshire-247-substance-misuse-support/

(e-mail: 247Hants@catch-22.org.uk , tel: 0800 599 9591,)

Parent Support Link www.parentsupportlink.org.uk/ (tel: 023 8039 9764)

Also see:

www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/winchester/14516369.LEGAL_HIGH_ALERT_11_needed_emergency_treatment_in_just_two_weeks/