

# ACTION UPDATE: [il]legal highs

**6 months since the change in the law  
our clients and advocates report:**

*"They are cutting it with all sorts you never know what is in your deal now."*

*"Last time I smoked Spice, two of my friends reckon I became verbally abusive within 10 minutes. I felt like I was out of my body like a ketamine dose. I was agitated and emotionally upset for the rest of the day. It was completely unexpected."*

*"When I decided to get clean there was nothing they could give me to help with the come down from legal highs, I just had to ride it out in rehab, go cold turkey for 3 months."*

*"People are still fitting but when the paramedics get called out they don't what people have taken."*

**The law on 'legal highs' has changed!**

This means that:

- Supplying them is now illegal.
- Possession is not illegal—unless you are in an institution like a prison.
- They are being sold by dealers and are often being cut with other chemicals.

This means it is more difficult to know what you are buying and the effect it will have.

Psychoactive Substances better known as 'Legal Highs' are designed to **mimic the effects of other illegal drugs** and can have similar effects.

Psychoactive Substances are dangerous substances, particularly because **you can never be entirely sure what is in them.**

A small change in **chemical make-up** can have a **big impact** on how it affects you so they may be very different from what you were expecting.

Even if it looks like weed it doesn't mean it is natural - synthetic cannabis like 'Spice' starts as a chemical powder, is dissolved into liquid then sprayed on to vegetable matter that looks a bit like cannabis. It is massively stronger than cannabis or skunk.

**Remember:** All dealers care about is making a profit – they don't care about the purity or the safety of whatever you are taking. The best way to stay safe is avoid these dangerous substances altogether.

## Groundswell's Homeless Health Peer Advocacy

**Do you need help getting to health appointments?**

Groundswell Peer Advocates, who have been homeless themselves, supported people to 2328 health appointments last year. Ask a key worker to refer you or get in touch with us yourself:

Phone: 03000 039 600

Email: [HHPA@groundswell.org.uk](mailto:HHPA@groundswell.org.uk)

Website: [www.groundswell.org.uk](http://www.groundswell.org.uk)



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# ACTION UPDATE!

## [il]legal highs

6 months ago a new UK law was put in place banning the sale, production, distribution and supply of psychoactive substances better known as 'legal highs'. You might still hear people talking about legal highs, and since it's a widely understood term, you might still find it used on the street. But, **'Legal Highs' are now illegal!**

### What are the health implications now the law has changed?

Taking psychoactive substances is damaging for your health whether legal or not. There is little research into the long-term impact on health due to being new to the market. Some effects are:

- They can cause comas, seizures and, in rare cases, death.
- They can be damaging to your mental health causing psychosis, paranoia, anxiety and depression. If you have existing conditions they can aggravate these.
- Comedowns can make people feel suicidal.
- They can reduce your inhibitions, so you may do harmful things you wouldn't normally do.
- You can't be sure of what is in them, so you can't be sure of the effect it will have on you.

With psychoactive substances being cut with other chemicals it's even more difficult to know what you are taking. It is also limiting the ability of drugs services to support people to stop using them and for emergency healthcare to treat people who are in crisis.

### What are the legal implications now?

All previously 'legal highs', including laughing gas, are now considered illegal, except for those with "specific exemptions" such as food, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and medical products. Put simply, any substance is illegal to produce or supply if it is likely to be used to 'get high'.

- **Possession on the street** is not illegal - sharing with someone can be considered 'supply'.
- **Possession in prison/detention centre** is illegal.
- **Dealing/supply** is now illegal. Even offering to supply is illegal.
- **Importing** them is illegal - and purchasing from a foreign website counts as importing!
- **Offences involving children** are considered 'aggravated' and carry heavier penalties - this includes supply to under 18s, dealing near a school during school hours or a children's home.

To see the full wording of the law go to: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/psychoactivesubstances.html>

### More info? Need Advice?

A good place to start: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

If you need to talk in confidence about stopping using - programmes like Narcotics Anonymous (NA) may be able to help: **0300 9991212**

Ask your key worker/support worker for help in finding your local substance misuse service.

Check out our last *Action Update* on 'legal highs' and other health topics here: [www.groundswell.org.uk/actionupdate](http://www.groundswell.org.uk/actionupdate)