



**LEGAL<sup>OR</sup> ILLEGAL HIGHS CAN  
CAUSE SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS  
THEY'RE ANYTHING BUT SAFE**

**HSE DRUGS HELPLINE 1800 459 459**

**[WWW.DRUGS.IE](http://WWW.DRUGS.IE)**

## What are they?

'Legal or illegal highs', 'head shop or herbal highs' are names given to psychoactive substances (drugs) that may be on sale in Ireland through shops that sell drug-related products (head shops, hemp shops) and other shops such as sex shops or tattoo parlours. They can also be bought on the internet. These drugs are sold as alternatives to drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, LSD, amphetamines and heroin.

There are several hundred types of these drugs that we know are available. These include drugs that act as:

- sedatives (downers),
- stimulants (uppers),
- hallucinogens (trips), and
- aphrodisiacs (sexual stimulants).



Some are herbal, meaning they come from a plant. Others are synthetic, meaning they are man-made from a variety of chemicals. Most are a mixture of both herbal and synthetic products.

Their effect on physical and mental health is unpredictable and there is also a risk of addiction. As these drugs may be bought in shops or over the internet people often feel it is safer to experiment with them.



## How can these drugs affect you?

None of these drugs have been tested on humans for safety, which means we know nothing about the medium or long term effects of using them. Some or all of them could have dangerous side-effects.

- Some can make you confused – so that you will be more likely to have an accident or take dangerous risks.
- Many are stimulants (uppers) which may stop you sleeping, leaving you exhausted and depressed later on.
- These drugs can have negative effects on mental health – people often say they feel 'head wrecked' after taking these drugs.
- They can be toxic to humans, even 'natural' or 'herbal' substances can cause damage such as kidney failure, coma and even death.

Even when a drug is banned, it is often possible for someone to re-design or change it slightly so the altered substance can be re-introduced onto the market. Even if we could ban all drugs currently on sale and close all the shops these drugs will still be available.

## What does the law say?

**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS CAN CAUSE SEIZURES**

Before any substance is banned the Government must first:

- identify and research it, and
- determine that it is a risk and should be banned.

In May 2010 the following groups of drugs were banned under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977:

- Synthetic cannabinoids – sold as herbal smoke, incense, Spice.
- BZP and derivatives – sold as party pills and alternatives to ecstasy and amphetamine.
- Mephedrone and derivatives – sold as bath salts or plant foods, as an alternative to cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamine.

The Ban under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 means it is illegal to import, export, produce, supply or possess any of these drugs.

## Not for human consumption



Many of these drugs on sale are labelled as 'not for human consumption', so that those selling and supplying these drugs can get around the law and avoid responsibility for any negative consequences. You have to think about the risks and consequences of your own actions and make safer choices - no-one else is going to do it for you.

## Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I know what's in the drug and what's been added to it?
- If it goes wrong, what will it do to me?
- If it goes right and I like it, could I get addicted?
- Would the people I'm with know what to do if I had a bad experience?
- Do I want to risk a criminal record?



## Reduce the risks

If you do choose to use drugs, there are some things you can do to reduce the risks.

- Don't use drugs alone – have a friend you trust with you.
- Don't drink alcohol or use different drugs at the same time.
- Don't share equipment such as pipes, rolled notes or needles as this can spread hepatitis and HIV.
- Check the ingredients on the products you buy.
- Stay well hydrated, particularly with drugs that stimulate – drink one pint of juice or water an hour.
- Don't use drugs with prescription medications such as Ritalin, asthma inhalers, tranquilisers or anti-depressant medication.
- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, don't use any drugs or alcohol.

Using psychoactive substances such as alcohol, drugs or both together increases the risk of unplanned and unprotected sex. You can reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections by always using condoms and another type of contraception.



## Need help after taking drugs?

### Unconscious, difficulty breathing, turning blue or difficult to rouse?

- Call an ambulance immediately on 999 or 112.
- Stay with the person until the ambulance arrives – be honest with the ambulance crew about what the person has taken.

### Having a bad experience?

**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS CAN CAUSE PARANOIA**

- Try not to panic – speak in a normal voice and try not to show if you are scared or worried.
- Explain that what they are feeling will pass.
- Encourage them to settle in a quiet calm room, dim the lights if you can.
- If they start breathing quickly, calm them down and ask them to take long, deep breaths.
- Don't allow them to over-exert themselves.
- Don't leave them alone.





Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



**IN AN EMERGENCY  
CALL 999 OR 112  
IMMEDIATELY**

**Further information on drugs and drug support services in your area:**

- **HSE Drugs Helpline 1800 459 459**
- **[WWW.DRUGS.IE](http://www.drugs.ie)**

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