



10 July 2015

For Directors of Public Health to cascade to:

Commissioners and providers of drug treatment and prevention services

Other relevant services that have, or may have, contact with drug users including: sexual health services; youth services; hostels; relevant information networks; and service users groups

For NHS England local area teams to cascade to:

General Practitioners

Accident & Emergency

Community Pharmacists

Dispensing General Practitioners

Providers of drug treatment in prisons

For action

General Practitioners

Accident & Emergency

Community Pharmacists

Dispensing General Practitioners

Drug treatment and other relevant services in contact with drug users

For information

NHS Foundation Trusts (England) – Medical Director

Consultants in Communicable Diseases

NHS Trusts (England) – Medical Director

Regional Directors of Public Health

Director of Public Health

Territorial CMOs in Ireland, Scotland & Wales

Clinical Commissioning Groups

Dear Colleague

RECENT INCREASE IN HARM FROM SYNTHETIC CANNABIS USE

This alert advises of the availability of herbal mixtures and powders sold as cannabis substitutes that contain powerful and harmful chemicals that have led to hospitalisations in this country and to deaths in other European countries. You should be alert to the increased possibility of toxicity arising from synthetic cannabinoid use, able to recognise possible symptoms of that toxicity and respond accordingly.

Synthetic cannabinoids

These drugs (sometimes called “Spice”) are intended to mimic the effects of cannabis and are so-called synthetic cannabinoids or synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists.

They are commonly sold sprayed onto inert herbal material. They are also sold as powder to be added to cigarettes by users.

The most harmful chemicals may be in brands like **Vertex**, **Sweet Leaf Obliteration** and **Skyhigh** but other brands also contain them. Brand names and what they contain are likely to change over time.

The chemicals currently causing the most concern are AB-CHMINICA, and MMB-CHMINACA (also known as MDMB-CHMICA). These are currently not controlled drugs.

Hospitalisations have occurred recently in North Wales, Lancashire and Cheshire after young people have used these drugs. Deaths have been reported in Germany and Sweden.

Actions advised

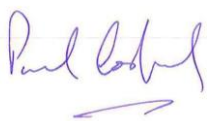
Recent reports from people affected suggest that acute toxicity is likely to present as dizziness, persistent nausea or vomiting, chest pains, dyspnea, fast or irregular heartbeat and convulsions. These effects should be managed symptomatically and may need urgent referral to A&E. Less severe or less acute physical or psychological problems should be assessed and managed symptomatically as for any other users of psychoactive drugs.

If you are asked for advice by people taking, or thinking of taking, synthetic cannabis, the following is suggested:

- The best advice is to not take drugs, as they can be dangerous
- Taking any herbal mixture or powder when you don't know what's in it is a big risk
- Up to date information for people considering using drugs, including advice on reducing risk, is available from www.talktofrank.com or from their helpline on 0800 77 66 00.

For further advice, medical professionals can use the [National Poisons Information Service](#) 24-hour telephone service or its online database, [TOXBASE](#).

To report any additional intelligence about the use and risks of synthetic cannabis please email drug.alerts@phe.gov.uk or call Robert Wolstenholme (020 3682 0537) or Steve Taylor (020 3682 0540) at Public Health England. This will enable suitable information to be shared with relevant agencies, and help in assessment of the need for any further action.



Professor Paul Cosford
Director for Health Protection & Medical Director