

'Legal High' FAQs

Q. What are 'legal highs'?

A. Legal highs or New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) are substances which when used mimic the effect of illegal drugs, such as cocaine or cannabis.

Q. How do they affect people?

A. There are 3 main categories of legal high:

- **Stimulant 'legal highs'** which act like amphetamines ('speed', mephedrone, naphyrone), cocaine or ecstasy and can lead to overconfidence and disinhibition, feelings of anxiety, panic, confusion, paranoia, and can even cause mental illness (psychosis).
- **'Downer' or sedative 'legal highs'** which are similar to cannabis, benzodiazepines (drugs like diazepam or Valium) and can reduce inhibition and concentration, slow down reaction time, produce feelings of lethargy, forgetfulness or physical unsteadiness.
- **Psychedelic or hallucinogenic 'legal highs'** which act like LSD, magic mushrooms, ketamine and methoxetamine, in turn causing confusion, panic and strong hallucinatory reactions ('bad trips'), making users behave erratically.

Q. How are they legal?

A. Legal highs are a bad definition of the product, as they may not be legal at all and may be sold using various names. Some packages have been found to contain controlled drugs. A testing programme of products sold over the internet revealed that 19% of products contained mixtures of substances, including controlled (illegal) ones.

'Legal highs' cannot be sold for human consumption so they are often sold as incense, salts or plant food to get round the law. The packaging may describe a list of ingredients but you cannot be sure that this is what the product contains.

The fact that a substance is sold as 'legal' doesn't mean that it is safe or legal. It's not possible to really be sure of what's in a 'legal high', or what effect it's likely to have. We know that many 'legal highs' are sold under brand names like 'Clockwork Orange', 'Bliss', 'Mary Jane' and have been directly linked to poisoning, emergency hospital admissions including in mental health services and, in some cases, deaths. In 2014, there were 129 reported deaths in England, Scotland and Wales where legal highs were implicated.

Q. What is the government trying to do to control their use?

A. The government announced new legislation in May 2015 to control the use of 'legal highs'. The Psychoactive Substance Bill is being progressed through Parliament and will prohibit and disrupt the production, distribution and sale of 'legal highs' in the UK, thus placing a ban on all psychoactive substances.

Q. What do they look like?

A. Legal highs are packaged for sale in many ways and are marketed as plant food, bath salts and research chemicals. Ingredients may be listed, but they may be inaccurate and there are variations in purity.

Many drugs that were previously sold as legal highs are now controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act, including mephedrone (meow meow), naphyrone, BZP, GBL and synthetic cannabinoids (such as those found in Spice products). This means that they are illegal to possess or to supply to others.

Q. What do I do if I suspect that someone is under the influence of a 'Legal high'?

A. You will need to commence the ['For Cause' drug and alcohol testing process](#). Staff are always expected to comply with Network Rail's lifesaving rule to 'Never work or drive while under the influence of drugs or alcohol'.