

Legal stand

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1977:

The Misuse of Drugs legislation regulates the import, export, production, supply and possession of a range of specified narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Substances are scheduled under the Act in accordance with Ireland's obligations under international conventions and/or where there is evidence that they are causing significant harm to public health in Ireland. The list of scheduled substances is kept under review and action is taken where evidence emerges that substances are being abused and are causing significant harm.

Examples: psychotropic ('magic') mushrooms were banned in 2006 and their possession and sale is now illegal. Similarly in 2009 BZP was banned.

"Legal status of Legal highs"

The main loophole used by the suppliers of legal highs is that these substances are not declared "controlled drugs" under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977.

Most of these substances have not been tested on humans or animals and the creators of such substances seem to produce new versions of the substances as soon as they are declared illegal which makes it very difficult to track and legislate. Another loophole is the fact that some of these products are destined to animal or plant consumption and the suppliers very clearly state in all their disclaimers that the products are not for human consumption.

In Ireland, a Research Advisory Group has been set up under the aegis of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, to identify possible options, including the possible regulation of head shops.

Note: The Minister for Health & Children, Mary Harney TD, said 'My Department is currently preparing further regulations which will introduce controls, similar to those recently introduced in the UK, on a range of substances which are on sale in head shops. This will make the possession and sale of these substances illegal and subject to criminal sanctions under the Misuse of Drugs Act. These regulations will be in place by June.'

Resources

www.drugs.ie (general information)

www.irishstatutebook.ie (legal texts)

www.citizeninformation.ie (consumer's rights/ misuse of drugs act)

www.drugsandalcohol.ie (national documentation centre on drugs and alcohol)

www.ballyfermotldtf.ie (Ballyfermot Local Drugs Task Force)

www.irishhealth.ie (latest articles on health)

www.emcdda.europa.eu (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction)

<http://www.drugscope.org.uk/resources/drugsearch> (Drugscope- UK)



LEGAL HIGHS & HEAD SHOPS

Some basic facts



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Legal Highs

Legal highs are intoxicating drugs that are not controlled or prohibited in Ireland under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977. In Ireland Legal Highs can be purchased in Head Shops. However some Sex shops and Tattoo parlours have been selling these substances as well. In addition, all these substances can be purchased over the internet from Irish and International websites.

Head shops

(smart shops, hemp shops, hemporia, growshops)

A head shop is a retail outlet specialising in drug paraphernalia related to consumption of various recreational drugs (cannabis bong, glass pipes etc), Increasingly they are supplying a wide variety of 'legal highs drugs' advertised as bath salts, plant feeders, and incense. These shops are flourishing in Ireland at the moment. Some of these shops seem to be open late (4am in some cases) and some provide a "take away" service.

Legal High Drugs are often designed to mimic the effects of Non Legal Drugs and are sold as such. Some examples of Legal Highs currently available are:

Salvia- sold as a legal alternative to Ecstasy and advertised as 'Incense' or 'Herbal Ecstasy'

Salvia is a stimulant and hallucinogenic drug and is sold in dry leaf form which is generally smoked.

Effects can vary from mild to full blown psychedelic hallucinations. There are concerns that it can trigger psychotic episodes, especially in young people and in people with underlying mental health issues.

Examples: *Salvia 20x, Experience Salvia 150fx*

Spice- sold as legal alternative to Cannabis and advertised as 'Incense' or 'Herbal Smoking Mixtures'

In many Spice mixtures, Synthetic Cannabinoids are sprayed onto dried plant mixtures, and the result is sold as herbal highs. Synthetic cannabinoids are designed to mimic the effects of THC (the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis).

Negative effects can include paranoia and memory loss. Prolonged use can be harmful to people with underlying mental illness including schizophrenia. Lack of consistency in the contents of Spice can mean that people do not know the strength of the product they are consuming.

Examples: *Spice, Spice Gold, Spice Diamond*

Cathinone Derivatives- sold as legal alternative to Cocaine, Ecstasy and Amphetamine type drugs and advertised as 'Bath Salts' or 'Plant Feeders'.

Cathinone is a naturally occurring stimulant found in the Khat plant. Examples of Cathinone derivatives are Mephedrone, Methyone and MDMCAT.

Effects can include: euphoria, talkativeness, alertness. Negative effects can include: anxiety, paranoia, psychosis, over stimulation of heart and nervous system, fits, severe nosebleeds, compulsive re-dosing, dehydration, stroke, heart attack, severe comedown, addiction.

Examples: *Sold as white powder in sachets Hurricane Charlie, Snow, Vanilla Sky, Meow Meow, Meph or sold as tablets eg Summer Daze or Doves*

Piperazines- sold as legal alternatives to Ecstasy/Speed/ Amphetamines and advertised as 'Plant Feeders' or 'Bath Salts'. They come in tablet, powder, capsule and liquid form.

Effects can include arousal, euphoria, irregular heart rhythm, convulsions, psychological dependence.

Examples: *Loved Up, Cherries, XXX.*

BZP is a piperazine and was banned in Ireland in 2009 as part of an EU-wide decision due to its similarity to Amphetamine ("Speed") and convulsions reported in UK clubbers. It has been linked to a number of suspected deaths in Europe, but other drugs were also found. Since then 'BZP-free' products have come on the market. Effects include: raised heart beat, raised blood pressure, convulsions, hypothermia.

Examples: *Trance, Beanz and Vegas Nights*

LSA containing products- sold as legal alternative to LSD and advertised as 'herbal highs'. Sold in tablet or seed form.

The seeds of the 'Morning Glory' and 'Hawaiian Baby Wood Rose' are two of the most common sources of LSA.

Effects include hallucinations, increased blood and heart pressure, nausea, derealisation.

Examples: *Purple Ohms, Shrooms, Trip E Happy Caps.*

Kratom- sold as legal alternative to opium/opiates (heroin) and is taken in tea, smoked, chewed or in capsule form. Sometimes advertised as an aid to moderating opium addiction.

Effects at low dose can include stimulation and increased sexual energy. Effects at high dose can include itchiness, sweating, nausea, lucid dreaming, psychosis, muscle and joint pain. Regular use can result in addiction.

Examples: *Kratom, Xscape, Krypton.*

Harm Reduction information for your Clients

- Taking legal high drugs if you suffer from any mental health issue, including depression and anxiety can be damaging. Some drugs can kick-start or exacerbate mental health problems. People suffering from schizophrenia are particularly at risk.
- Although many products available in Head Shops are advertised as 'natural' or 'herbal' highs, a large number are not purely herbal and contain synthetic elements that can be damaging to human health.
- It is advisable NOT to mix any legal high drug with either Alcohol or another substance. The actual contents of many of these drugs are unknown and it is unclear what way they will interact with other drugs when inside the body.
- The time that it takes for a drug to take effect can vary. Taking another dose because you think the drug isn't working can be dangerous and result in overdose or a prolonged psychotic episode.
- Be aware that once you start a 'trip' you cannot stop it. The immediate effects of some drugs can last for 8-10 hours. Longer term effects such as anxiety and paranoia can last for weeks. Be aware that some drugs may result in flashbacks of a psychotic episode weeks after taking them.
- Dehydration can result from taking some of the cathinone based drugs eg Mephedrone. Rehydrate slowly by sipping water. Over rehydration can result in water intoxication. Injecting "Bath Salts" carries all of the risks associated with injecting heroin or cocaine especially if the works are shared. The risk of blood clots and DVT (deep vein thrombosis) seems particularly high.
- Avoid these drugs completely if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. Some are likely to be toxic to the developing foetus and could therefore cause birth defects or result in brain damage to the baby.
- There is no 'quality control' nor has there been any controlled testing on these substances. All drugs, even those prescribed by doctors, have side effects, some of which are usually fatal for a minority of unfortunate individuals. It is inevitable that some of these substances will have occasional fatal side effects, causing death by acute heart failure or acute liver failure for example. If you feel ill, consult a doctor quickly and make sure to inform him/her about your use of these substances.