

### **Introduction:**

Due to increasing concern and evidence of widespread use of 'legal highs' throughout Scotland since 2009, a need to provide regular updates to a range of agencies and professionals, particularly those with concerns for the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults, has been identified. **This particular update relates to Mephedrone.**

### **Local Picture:**

Information from Grampian Police suggests that like many other areas in Scotland, the prevalence of Mephedrone is increasing. It appears to be used mainly by younger people, including those of secondary school age and students. Anecdotal accounts from users suggests that it's lack of regulation and therefore 'legal' status makes it more appealing as there are no punitive ramifications. Members of teaching staff at a number of local schools have sought information on Mephedrone, highlighting it's availability amongst pupils.

No 'head shops' or retail premises (other than gardening suppliers) have been identified as selling Mephedrone, implying that it is sourced, in the main, via the Internet. Here it is advertised as a plant food and labelled '*not for human consumption*'.

Like illegal drugs, Mephedrone is a commodity in the eyes of the drug dealer and one which will reap large financial reward. As with other drugs, it will inevitably be bulked out by adding other substances to enhance profit margins. In so doing, users will have no idea of what they are sourcing.

### **Key Messages:**

The recent emergence of so called 'legal highs' (and mephedrone in particular) is a cause for concern:

- *Mephedrone is readily accessible and we have anecdotal evidence that local young people do have knowledge regarding the existence of 'legal highs', although we do not have accurate information as yet regarding the prevalence of use*
- *The legal position of any substance should not be confused with its safety. There is a concern that many recreational drug users (and some young people in particular) are taking the view that legal = safe*
- *Using Mephedrone can lead to unpredictable effects on the individual and very little is known about both the short and long term effects on human health. It has however been linked to numerous incidents of poisoning and in some cases deaths*
- *Like a number of street drugs, the chemical composition of what is bought and consumed is often unknown to the user, and it may contain other illegal or harmful substances*

- *Therefore, any advice given should be to avoid taking such substances wherever possible, regardless of legal status*
- *For those who may already have used or are currently using such a substance and have expressed concern regarding use, it would be recommended to seek medical advice and/or contact a local Drugs Agency (further details see p4 below)*

#### **Detailed Information on Use and Effects of Mephedrone:**

- 4-Methylmethcathinone (Mephedrone) is a synthetic stimulant
- A relatively new drug (often referred to as a 'legal high'), Mephedrone has a variety of street names including *Meph*, *4-MMC*, *MCAT*, *Drone*, *Meow* and *Bubbles*
- Mephedrone is usually sold as a powder and snorted, although it can be taken orally in capsule format. It may also appear as an ingredient in other legal pills and powders, possibly without the actual name appearing on the packaging
- Though similar in name, it should not be confused with Methadone as they are completely different substances. Methadone is a legally prescribed pharmaceutical drug typically used as an opiate substitute for heroin addiction
- Mephedrone use appears to be primarily 'recreational' at this time
- Effects are often described as a mix between ecstasy and cocaine. Users say they feel more alert, confident and talkative. Like cocaine, the effects appear to last around an hour before wearing off. If taken orally effects may last between 2-3 hours. It is reported users often feel the urge to 're-dose' before effects wane, and therefore there have been reports of users taking more of the drug than they intended and finding it difficult to stop
- Side effects and the safety of the substance are relatively unknown and not subject to extensive research and testing. Only anecdotally reported information is currently available suggesting that: excess sweating; headaches; heart palpitations; short-term memory loss; insomnia; vertigo; nausea; and cold or discoloured (blue) fingers form potential side effects. Some user reports have suggested vasoconstriction when snorting: pain and swelling in nose and throat including sinusitis. Some side effects are common with other stimulants like ecstasy and cocaine
- Nothing is known of the effects of taking Mephedrone along with other drugs, including alcohol, although again, anecdotal reports suggest that negative side effects are often exacerbated by using Mephedrone in combination with other substances
- Anecdotal reports suggest heavy use can lead to paranoia, hallucinations and serious panic attacks. Similarly with other drug misuse, Mephedrone use has been linked to deaths in both Europe and in the UK. There are a number of reports of users turning up in A&E departments due to effects of poisoning

- It is important to note that Mephedrone is an uncontrolled and non pharmaceutical substance and it may include other (illegal and/or harmful) substances within its composition. Mephedrone has no licensed medicinal use and therefore does not have a scientific background (with appropriate testing). Therefore long term health effects are unknown. Mephedrone is currently being sold as plant food or bath salts, and as such often labelled as *not for human consumption*
- As with other similar stimulant type substances, there is no reported physical withdrawal syndrome, although psychological dependency is possible

### **Legal Situation:**

Mephedrone *is not* currently controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act. That means it is currently legal to buy and be in possession of, however, the legal position around selling is more complex. It is against the law to sell, supply or advertise it for human consumption under the Medicines Act, explaining why most websites label the drug as 'plant food' and 'not for human consumption'.

The Police Service in the absence of legislative control, have no powers to deal with Mephedrone possession. However, consideration would be given to legal proceedings in the event of someone becoming seriously ill or dying after ingesting Mephedrone. Such considerations would fall under Common Law. Persons in possession of Mephedrone may still be subjected to searches under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, if there was a reasonable cause to suspect they were in possession of a controlled drug. Only seizure and laboratory examination of substances would show whether this was the case or not.

Although currently a legal substance other partnerships representing responsible business interests, such as UNIGHT Aberdeen; a partnership of Aberdeen night venues, Grampian Police and Safer Aberdeen, have taken steps to ban any customers possessing or using legal highs such as Mephedrone on their premises. The UNIGHT goal is to ensure customers enjoy the best and safest night out possible, with some 22 members currently involved, representing the majority of late night city centre venues.

Mephedrone is already illegal in Israel, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The government's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) has been asked to research the harms linked to legal highs like mephedrone.

The panel is expected to report back to the Home Office in March of this year.

**Advice/Support:**

Drugs Action Aberdeen: [www.drugsaction.co.uk](http://www.drugsaction.co.uk) Helpline (01224) 594700

Turning Point Scotland: [www.turningpointscotland.com/studio\\_8](http://www.turningpointscotland.com/studio_8) (01343) 543792

Know the Score: [www.knowthescore.info](http://www.knowthescore.info) Talk to Frank: [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

**Information Sharing and Co-ordination Contacts:**

ADP Support Team Aberdeen City: Fraser Hoggan: [Fraser.Hoggan@nhs.net](mailto:Fraser.Hoggan@nhs.net)

ADP Support Team Aberdeenshire: Linda Watt: [lindawatt2@nhs.net](mailto:lindawatt2@nhs.net)

ADP Support Team Lead Moray: John Campbell: [John.Campbell@moray.gov.uk](mailto:John.Campbell@moray.gov.uk)

Grampian Police (Force Substance Misuse Co-ordinator):

Andrew Imray: [Andrew.Imray@grampian.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Andrew.Imray@grampian.pnn.police.uk)

Drugs Action (Depute General Manager): Angus McCurrach: [angus@drugsaction.co.uk](mailto:angus@drugsaction.co.uk)



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*Sources/References:*

*Drugs Action Aberdeen, Crew 2000 Edinburgh, Scottish Crime & Drugs Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) Drug Trends Bulletin, Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University*