



**LEGAL** OR **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 of, 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 chemicals. Most are a mixture of both herbal and synthetic products.

These drugs are all psychoactive substances, that means they alter how you think, feel and behave. Their effect on physical and mental health is unpredictable and there is a risk of becoming addicted.

## Why do people take these drugs ?

People tell us that they try these drugs for many reasons:

- out of curiosity,
- because their friends are doing it,
- to escape boredom or worries,
- to change how they feel, and
- because they believe it is a fun or 'cool' thing to do.



As these drugs may be bought in shops or over the internet people often feel it is safer for them to experiment. These drugs are convenient and easily accessed by:

- young people who have not experimented with other drugs, and
- people who have or are using other drugs and choose these drugs to use as alternatives to cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine, heroin, methadone or morphine.

## What does the law say?

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 or incense, as an alternative to cannabis.
- BZP and derivatives – sold as party pills, as an alternative to ecstasy and amphetamine.
- Mephedrone and derivatives – sold as bath salts or plant foods, as an alternative to cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamine.

The Criminal Justice (Psychoactive Substances) Bill 2010 makes it a criminal offence to sell or supply substances for human consumption which may not be specifically banned under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, but which have psychoactive effects.

The legislation will allow the Gardaí to bring the people who sell or supply these drugs to Court. If they are found guilty they will be fined or given a custodial sentence.



**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN CAUSE SEIZURES**



## 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 or risks. Some drugs have legitimate uses in industry and animal care.

None of these drugs have been tested on humans for safety. We know nothing about the medium or long-term effects of using these drugs. 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.
- They can cause anxiety, panic attacks, paranoia or even psychotic illnesses.
- 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.



**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN CAUSE PARANOIA**

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

## So what can I do to protect my teenager from these drugs ?

As an adult there are a number of steps you can take to help protect young people.

### Know the facts

It is not simply enough to label drugs 'illegal'. Talk to young people and share the information you have with them, discuss the dangers for their long term health and well-being. If you do this they can start to make choices based on the facts, and an understanding of the actual dangers to their physical and mental health.



### Encourage them to assess the risk

We have to encourage young people, whether they use drugs or not, to think about the risks and consequences of all their actions and to make choices based on this.



You can encourage a realistic assessment of the risks – so don't minimise the risk or exaggerate the dangers. You may be tempted to counteract their tendency to ignore the dangers, but a balanced approach is more helpful in the long run.



## Discuss drugs

Discussion enables young people to think for themselves. Listen to what they have to say and you may find they have questions and information of their own.

### Here are some things you can discuss:

- Why are they thinking about using drugs?
- Is there a better way to enjoy themselves?
- What is actually in the drug and what has been added to it?
- What might this drug do to their body and mind when they take it?
- If it goes wrong, what are the risks? Could it have a lasting health effect?
- If it goes right and they like it, could they get to like it too much for their own good?
- Is the world of drugs really for them?

### If they choose to take drugs:

- Where are they and who are they with when taking drugs?
- Would they know what to do if one of the others had a bad trip or became paranoid?
- Are the people they're with going to look after them if they have a problem?
- Are they under the influence of drugs or alcohol?
- Do friends or family know where they are?



## What should I do if someone I know decides to take these drugs?

Some young people will assess the risks and still choose to use these drugs. These drugs are new and the long term consequences are unknown.

You need to remember that you cannot 'make' your child change their behaviour. Once they become independent, you cannot 'make' them say no to drugs – they are responsible for their own actions. However, there are positive things you can take to encourage and support young people to change their behaviour.



# Take positive action

If the young person you are worried about is your own child, then one of the ways to take positive action is to set up a 'family meeting'. Try to do this at a time when you feel able to talk to them calmly and where there will be no interruptions. Do not try to deal with this when they are under the influence of the drug or when you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

If the young person is not your own child, then consider talking to their parents or a responsible adult who cares for them.

## 1. Know the facts:

### What drug?

Try to find out which drug or product they are using. Find information on common psychoactive substances and drugs on [www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie).

### What harm?

This is important. Has any harm happened to them recently? When a person starts to use drugs, there is often a 'honeymoon' period during which the drug causes little or no visible harm. It may be easier to intervene when there is harm you can focus on.

## 2. Show your care and concern:

Let them know that you are worried and why. If there has been some sort of harm, name it. If you are certain that they are using drugs, let them know that you know.

## 3. Stick to the facts:

Focus on visible facts, such as drugs found, poor reports from school or work, weight loss or other effects.



**4. Hold them responsible for their own choices:**

Remind them that you cannot always rescue them from harm they bring on themselves, whether it is caused by drugs or not. Tell them what you expect from them, such as staying drug-free, keeping up their normal activities at school or work, and sticking to family rules.

**5. Offer support and set consequences:**

Offer your child as much support as they need, if they are making an effort to change for the better. If their behaviour improves, acknowledge this and give credit where it is due.

You need to clearly state what you will do if they do not change their behaviour. You should link the punishment to the rule broken, for example if you catch your child smoking with their friends, ground them from social activities for a period of time. You also need to recognise that they may choose not to change, in which case you must choose what you will do next.

**6. Talk to others:**

Other parents can be a very useful source of information and support. You may not want to share your concerns or suspicions, out of shame or embarrassment, but this can really help.

**7. Seek professional help:**

Sometimes you may need help and support from professionals who are trained in this area. Visit [www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie) or call the HSE Drugs Helpline 1800 459 459 to find out about support agencies near you.





## If someone continues to use drugs there are ways to reduce the risks

- Don't use drugs alone – have a friend they trust with them.
- 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 they 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, tranquillisers, anti-depressant medication.
- If they 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. They can reduce their risk of unplanned pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections by always using condoms and another type of contraception.



**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS CAN  
MAKE YOU ACT LIKE A FOOL**

## If someone needs help after taking these drugs

### **If they are unconscious, having 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.

### **If they are having a bad experience:**

- Try not to panic! Speak in a normal voice and try not to let it 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.
- Reassure them, speak in a low, calm voice.
- Don't allow them to over-exert themselves.
- Don't leave them alone.



**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN CAUSE PARANOIA  
THEY'RE ANYTHING BUT SAFE**

**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN CAUSE IMPOTENCE  
THEY'RE ANYTHING BUT SAFE**

**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN CAUSE KIDNEY FAILURE  
THEY'RE ANYTHING BUT SAFE**

**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN MAKE YOU ACT LIKE A FOOL  
THEY'RE ANYTHING BUT SAFE**

**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN CAUSE HEART PROBLEMS  
THEY'RE ANYTHING BUT SAFE**

**LEGAL OR ILLEGAL HIGHS  
CAN CAUSE SEIZURES  
THEY'RE ANYTHING BUT SAFE**

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

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

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