

# NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS) (SYNTHETICS)

Have you heard of New Psychoactive Substances or NPS, sometimes called Emerging Psychoactive Substances or EPS? Or sometimes even synthetics or synthetic drugs. What are they?

## WHAT'S A NPS?

It's a hard question to answer. Generally, NPS are drugs that are designed to mimic and produce similar effects to some illicit drugs including cannabis, cocaine, LSD and ecstasy.

There are three most common types of NPS.

1. The first type are party pills, pellets or small bottles of liquid. They are sometimes marketed as natural supplements that increase energy or mood. They have similar effects to ecstasy or amphetamines; however they can contain man-made chemicals which are often not listed on the packaging.
2. Synthetic cannabis, the second type, is made when plants or plant-like mixtures are sprayed with a solution of chemicals that mimic the effects of THC – which is the psychoactive ingredient of the *Cannabis sativa* plant. Often the quantity of these chemicals sprayed onto the plants or plant matter is not known. They can be classified as 'research chemicals' which means that they are experimental chemicals not suitable for human consumption. Experimental chemicals, used in unknown quantities, can make the effects of synthetic cannabis unpredictable.
3. The final type of NPS, research chemicals and drug analogues (which are compounds that are similar in structure to others), are marketed as pure psychoactive drugs under a range of names including research chemicals, plant food or bath salts. Sometime the words 'not for human consumption' or 'only for research purposes' are found on the packaging however no matter how they are described, any research chemicals or drug analogues have the potential to cause harm.

## ARE THEY SAFER THAN OTHER ILLICIT DRUGS?

The biggest misconception about NPS is that they are safer than using other illicit drugs. They are not. Even though they may be advertised as legal or synthetic they are unregulated and untested and therefore – unsafe. Each batch may be a very different product given that the chemicals in these drugs are constantly changing and the packaging, if there is any, can be misleading. It often doesn't list all the ingredients or the correct amounts of each ingredient.

## HOW CAN THEY AFFECT YOU?

Because NPS are relatively new there is limited information available about their short and long-term effects; however there are a few things to consider.

Like with the use of all other drugs, negative side-effects and overdose are more likely when NPS are taken in combination with alcohol or other drugs. Polydrug use (using more than one type of drug, either at the same time or at different times) increases your risk of harm.

Many manufacturers creating NPS include a range of fillers and cutting agents. The inclusion of fillers, such as lactose or sucrose to add bulk to the product, and cutting agents, which are chemicals used to dilute the drugs with something less expensive than the drug itself, could lead to significant health problems for the user especially if there is no accurate ingredient list.

As well as fillers and cutting agents in NPS, other drugs could be included.

Caffeine, for example, is contained in many NPS products, sometimes in high quantities. Mixing NPS with additional caffeine consumption through coffee or other caffeine drinks could lead to some unpleasant side effects. Other stimulants, such as methamphetamine, may also be contained in NPS. This 'polydrug' use can increase the risk of harm.



Another potential risk to consider is that it's difficult for medical practitioners to treat someone who has overdosed or has health problems as a result of using NPS if they don't know what was in the product.

### WHAT THE LAW SAY?

In WA, NPS are all illegal under the *Misuse of Drugs Amendment (Psychoactive Substances) Bill 2015*. This Bill regulates the manufacture, sale, supply and promotion of psychoactive substances. It states that if the substance is represented in any way as psychoactive, which means that the substance alters how you experience yourself and the world, then it's taken to be a psychoactive substance and the person in possession of the substance can be charged. This Bill also states it's illegal to manufacture, advertise, market, sell or supply a psychoactive substance.

So, what do we know? The three key messages about NPS are:

1. NPS are drugs that are designed to mimic and produce similar effects to some illicit drugs.
2. The content of NPS is not always known. This makes the effects of the drug unpredictable and the long term effects unknown.
3. All NPS in WA are illegal.

### NEED HELP?

If you or anyone you know is experiencing a drug use issue, contact WA's 24hr Drug and Alcohol Support Line.

- Metro (08) 9442 5000
- Country 1800 198 024
- Emergency 000

Live chat with a qualified and experienced drug counsellor is also offered at:  
<http://drugaware.com.au>

### REFERENCES

Government of Western Australia. (2015). *Misuse of Drugs Amendment (Psychoactive Substances) Bill 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/bills.nsf/BillProgressPopup?openForm&ParentUNID=968109CA9BC8A42B48257E4B000E9D70>