

Home Secretary seeks advice on controlling dangerous opioid

Home Secretary Priti Patel will seek expert advice on tightening controls on a substance linked to multiple fatalities resulting from heroin overdoses under the Misuse of Drugs Act, the Home Office announced today (Friday 21st January).

The Home Secretary has written to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) to commission advice on three substances, including Isotonitazene, an opioid that has been used instead of or in addition to heroin.

In early 2021, the National Crime Agency said that more than 46 overdoses and 16 deaths linked to Isotonitazene had been reported in a 10-day period. Public Health England issued a warning in August 2021 that the overdoses may have been caused by heroin mixed with Isotonitazene. Current data indicates there have been 25 deaths and seven overdoses linked to Isotonitazene up to September 2021.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Reports of fatal overdoses linked to this dangerous substance have been deeply disturbing, and I want to act now to ensure no further lives are lost or families torn apart.

I'm determined to end the misery and destruction caused by the misuse of drugs and will consider the ACMD's expert advice on tightening restrictions on this dangerous substance.

The Home Secretary will request advice on the appropriate classification and scheduling of Isotonitazene and related compounds under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and associated Regulations. She is also commissioning the ACMD for advice on two other substances:

- CUMYL-PeGACLONE – a synthetic cannabinoid
- Diphenidine, a substance which can have ketamine-like effects

The Home Secretary is determined to act swiftly to crack down on the harms caused by the misuse of such dangerous substances.

Currently the three substances are covered by the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, meaning that while supply of the substances is unlawful, possession is not.

Due to the concerning reports around the effects of these three substances, the UK voted in favour of international control along with other countries at

the Commission on Narcotic Drugs meeting which took place between 12-16 April 2021.

The Home Office has a statutory duty to consult the ACMD under the Misuse of Drugs Act before amending the legislation.

The move comes after the government recently published its 10-year Drug Strategy to tackle the harms caused by drug misuse. Illegal drugs are a major driver of homicide – 48% of all homicides in the year to March 2020 were drug-related.

The Strategy involves measures to reduce both demand and supply of illegal drugs including:

- dismantling over 2,000 county lines, which are used to supply drugs and often involve recruiting children
- investing a record £780m in the drug treatment system to get people off the drugs that fuel crime in the first place
- delivering a generational shift in demand for illegal drugs, including by ensuring people face tougher consequences for so-called recreational misuse