

News story: System launched to help tackle harms from new psychoactive substances

Last year, according to the 2015 to 2016 Crime Survey for England and Wales, one in 40 (2.5%) young adults aged 16 to 24 took a new psychoactive substance and there is evidence of widespread use among vulnerable adults such as prisoners and homeless people. Whilst specialist services are responding, these harms are often poorly understood in frontline healthcare services and there is little guidance available to them.

Public Health England (PHE) in collaboration with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is piloting a national system to help better monitor the negative effects of NPS and share best treatment practice across a variety of settings, including A&E, sexual health clinics, mental health services, prison health services, drug treatment services and GP surgeries.

The UK-wide, easy to use Report Illicit Drug Reaction (RIDR) system will be accessible to all front line health staff. Information about the drug and its effects will be recorded anonymously using an online portal. Data from the tool will be analysed by experts to identify patterns of symptoms and harms. This will be used to inform treatment guidance and help staff deal more quickly with unknown substances, and improve patient safety.

Rosanna O'Connor, Director of Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco at PHE, said:

The contents of NPS frequently change and their effects can be dangerous and unpredictable. These substances can cause serious problems to both mental and physical health.

Last year's ban has helped reduce their easy availability, but we are still seeing the most vulnerable groups, particularly, the homeless, prisoners and some young people, suffering the greatest harm from these substances.

The new RIDR system will help health staff better deal with the emerging challenges we are seeing. We want to encourage all frontline staff in settings such as A&E, sexual health clinics, prisons, drug and mental health services, to use the system, which over time will greatly increase our knowledge of these new substances and ultimately improve patient care.

Dr Sarah Elise Finlay, Emergency Medicine Consultant, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, said:

The information and advice provided by this new system will ultimately ease some of the burden and stress of managing those tricky overdose and poisoning cases in the early hours over the weekend in emergency settings.

Emergency services are facing significant pressure, which is why we've made the RIDR system as easy as possible for health staff. It's great to know that, in future, help will be at hand for health staff dealing with the harms of these often unknown new drugs.

More information, including on how to register, is available on the [RIDR website](#).