

# ACTION UPDATE

## Update 5: 'Legal Highs'

### Key facts on 'Legal Highs'

- 'Legal Highs' aren't harmless— people have got physically addicted with nasty withdrawals, had seizures and even died.
- Don't trust the label— it's often not true, shopkeepers don't always know what they are selling and even if it looks the same as last time, it might not be.
- If you are going to use them: start with a small amount, watch out for your mates and know to get help if you need it.

### Groundswell's Action Updates

Groundswell's Peer Advocates support homeless people to attend over 1,400 health appointments a year. Each month our **Action Updates** highlight a topic which homeless people have told us is important and offers practical advice around the issue. The guidance and quotes are based on what our Peer Advocates see first hand when working with homeless people to improve health.

**FAKE POT  
REAL  
PROBLEMS**

**'Legal Highs' - Groundswell's Experience**  
Groundswell's Peer Advocates see first hand what's happening in hostels and day centres. 'Legal High' use is becoming widespread — and is having damaging effects on people:

*"This resident, I've seen him shaking, sweating, going to the toilet like he was coming off methadone or gear."*

*"I don't think there's enough information out there, we don't really know what the long term effects are but we have seen people have died through seizures."*

*"People are spending as much on Spice as they were on heroin. They can't get up in the morning without it and in the evenings they can't sleep without it."*

### Groundswell

Groundswell exists to enable homeless and vulnerable people to take more control of their lives, have a greater influence on services and to play a full role in our community.

### Homeless Health Peer Advocacy

Groundswell works to improve the health of homeless people. Peer Advocates, who have been homeless themselves, can go with you to physical health appointments to help you to get the best service from the NHS. Practically we can offer you:

- Help to make health appointments
- Go with you to your health appointments
- Pay for your travel fares if needed.

Find out more at: [www.groundswell.org.uk](http://www.groundswell.org.uk)  
Call our office on: 03000 039 600.  
Email us at: [info@groundswell.org.uk](mailto:info@groundswell.org.uk)



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# ACTION UPDATE!

## Update 4: 'Legal Highs'

Just because 'Legal Highs' are legally sold doesn't mean they are safe. It doesn't even mean they are legal! If you use 'Legal Highs' you really don't know what you are taking— They can have serious health risks and people have died as a result of taking them.

### What are 'Legal Highs'?

- Also known as New Psychoactive Substances or NPS they can have similar effects to illegal drugs— they're usually sold at head shops or on the internet claiming to be legal.
- There are hundreds of different 'Legal Highs' marketed under loads of different names. The makers can't sell them as 'drugs' - usually they are labelled as something like 'not for human consumption', 'plant food', 'herbal incense'.
- **You can't trust what it says on the label!** Most are designed to be similar to existing drugs but different enough to be legal. **Many contain illegal substances so the police can confiscate them.**
- **Even if it looks like weed doesn't mean it is natural** - synthetic cannabis like 'Spice' starts as a chemical powder, is dissolved into liquid then sprayed on to vegetable matter that looks a bit like cannabis. **It is massively stronger than cannabis or skunk.**
- 'Legal highs' are being banned all the time and producers re-make them with different formulas. **What you buy one day may be completely different the next - even if it looks the same.**
- A small change in chemical make-up can have a big impact on how it affects you so **they may be very different from what you were expecting.**



### What do we know about 'Legal Highs'? - Not a lot!!!

- In 2014, 101 new drugs were found in Europe—25% more than the year before. **When things are changing that fast, there's no way you can know what you are taking and if you get in to trouble hospitals can find it difficult to treat you.**
- Chemicals in 'legal highs' aren't for human consumption and have **not been medically tested.**
- **We do know there are health risks involved with using 'legal highs' and that people have died as a result of using them.** The most recent figures from the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths (NPSAD) reveal a 600% rise in deaths a year related to legal highs in the UK.



**If you want help or more information on 'legal highs', contact your local drug service (find at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) or contact FRANK at [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com) or 0300 123 6600.**

*"I think its simple just **DO NOT TAKE THAT SHIT!** I tried it once I thought I was going to die. I was sick, it was horrible, I'd never touch it again."*

*"It seems to be very similar to coming off heroin – hot and cold, shaking, sweating."*



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