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Drugs a-to-z

Emerging Drugs: Factsheet



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year: Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Emerging Drugs (“Legal Highs”)

Tags: synthetic drugs, bath salts, plant food, K2, spice, kronic, meow meow, rapture

Time Allocated: Partial lesson (under 45mins)

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

What are Emerging Drugs?

In recent years, many ‘new’ drugs have arrived on the market. These are often advertised as **‘legal highs’**, despite the fact that in many cases they are not legal. These substances are also marketed as **‘synthetic drugs’, ‘party pills’, ‘research chemicals’,** or **‘plant food’**, and are often used instead of other illegal drugs. They are sometimes sold in stores or online and marketed as ‘legal’ and ‘safe’. However, many contain ingredients that are actually illegal and can be very dangerous.

Most of these new psychoactive substances are illegal, or are quickly made illegal, because of health risks.

Continual changes to these products make it hard to know what they contain, what the effects will be and what potential impact they make have on users in the short and long term. Current substances include:

Type of Substance	Examples	Street Names	Attempt to copy the effects of
Synthetic Cannabinoids	“Herbal Smoking Blends"	K2, Spice, Kronik, Northern Lights	Cannabis
Synthetic Cathinones	Mephedrone Methylone MDPV	Meow Meow, M-Kat M1 Ivory Wave, Bath Salts	MDMA/Ecstasy, methamphetamine
Synthetic Piperazines	BZP, TFMPP	A2, Rapture	MDMA/Ecstasy, methamphetamine, hallucinogens
Substituted Phenethylamines	2C-x family: 2C-I, 2C-B NBOMe family: 25I-NBOMe, 25B-NBOMe, 25C-NBOMe. DOI 6-APB	Trypstacy, Bromo, TWO’s N-Bomb Death on Impact Benzo Fury	MDMA/Ecstasy, methamphetamine, hallucinogens
Dissociative Anaesthetics	Methoxetamine	MXE, Moxy	Ketamine
Substituted Tryptamines	5-MeO-DMT	Foxy	Hallucinogens

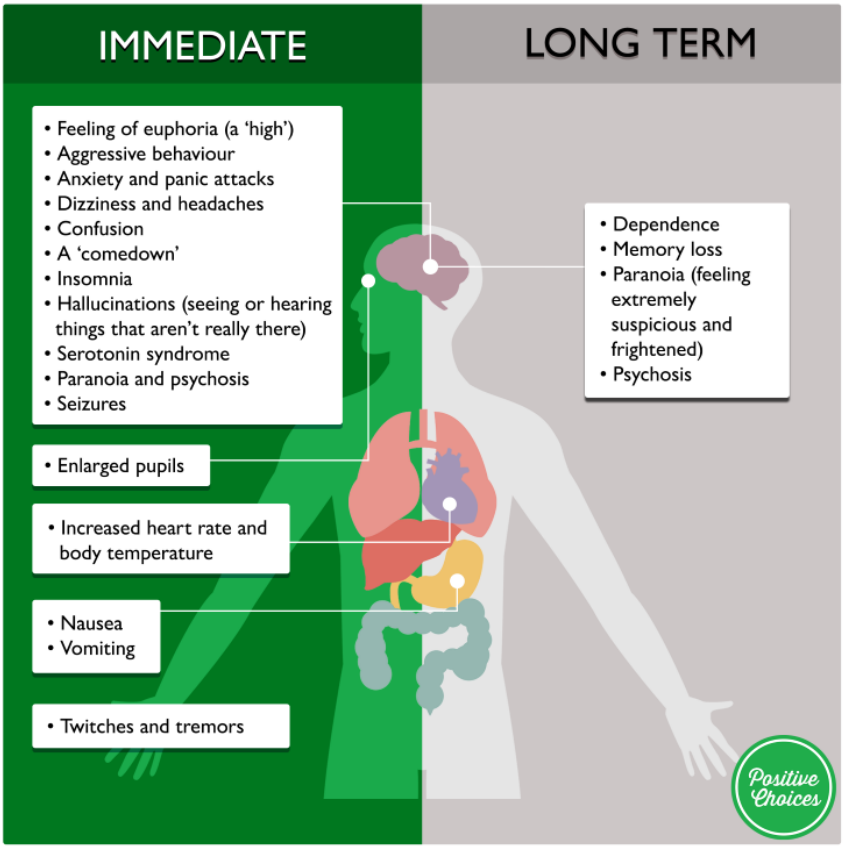
One pill (or package) may contain a mixture of different substances. Emerging drugs are sold under a wide range of different names and the list is always growing. As of 2022 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has identified at least 1,100 emerging drugs. Names change frequently and people who use these drugs cannot be sure about what they're getting as the packaging doesn't guarantee what's inside.

What are the effects of Emerging Drugs?

Taking these is like a roll of the dice — they haven't been around long enough to know what the immediate risks are or what might happen in the long run to people who use them. However, it is known that a small number of people have died from using some types of new drugs.

The effects of new drugs can be immediate or long-term, as listed in the table below.

Immediate	**Long -term** ***Early information from research suggests that these new drugs may lead to a range of problems including:***
Increased heart rate and body temperature	Dependence (see glossary)
Enlarged pupils	Memory problems
Feeling of euphoria (a 'high')	Paranoia (feeling extremely suspicious and frightened)
Twitches and tremors	Psychosis (see glossary).
Aggressive behaviour	
Anxiety and panic attacks	
Nausea and vomiting	
Dizziness and headaches	
Confusion	
A 'comedown' (see glossary)	
Insomnia	
Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't really there)	
Overdose	
Serotonin syndrome (see glossary)	
Paranoia and psychosis	
Seizures	



Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University.

Sources

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