

NPS

New psychoactive substances

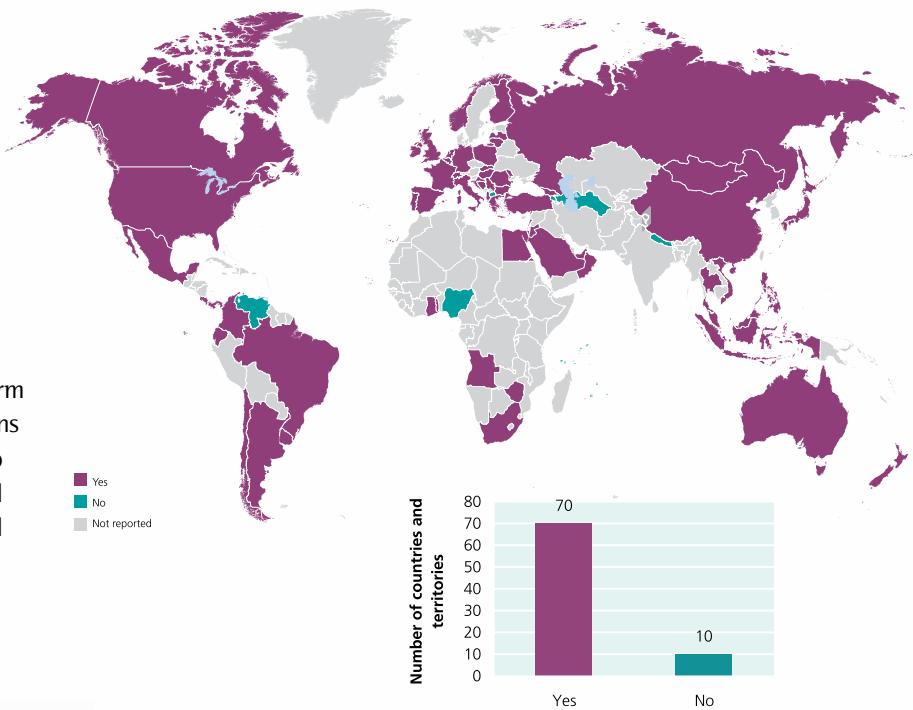
NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

The world is witnessing an alarming new drug problem – and much of the drugs are legal. Marketed as “legal highs”, “research chemicals”, “plant food” and “bath salts,” NPS are proliferating at an unprecedented rate and posing significant public health challenges. The total number of such substances, already estimated to be in the hundreds, is growing steadily. Mixtures of NPS bought unknowingly by users have resulted in unpredictable and sometimes disastrous effects.

What are NPS?

These new psychoactive substances (NPS) have been known in the market by terms such as “designer drugs”, “legal highs”, “herbal highs”, “bath salts”, “research chemicals”, “laboratory reagents”. To promote clear terminology on this issue, UNODC only uses the term “new psychoactive substances (NPS)” which are defined as “substances of abuse, either in a pure form or a preparation, that are not controlled by the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but which may pose a public health threat”. The term “new” does not necessarily refer to new inventions – several NPS were first synthesized 40 years ago – but to substances that have recently emerged on the market and which have not been scheduled under the above Conventions.

Global emergence of new psychoactive substances up to July 2012:



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Challenge of New Psychoactive Substances* (Vienna, March 2013).

What are the risks of NPS?

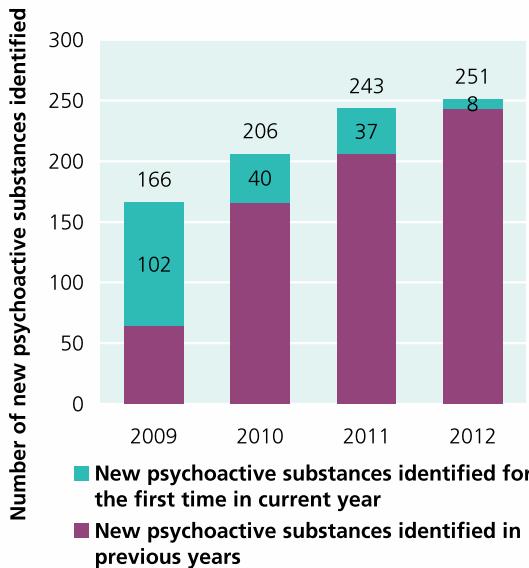
The use of NPS is often linked to health problems. NPS users have frequently been hospitalized with severe intoxications. There have also been a number of unexplained suicides associated with preceding use of synthetic cannabinoids (*Spice*). In addition, substances like 4-methylmethcathinone (mephedrone), methylenedioxypyrovalerone (MDPV), 4-methylamphetamine (4-MA) have been associated with fatalities.

How widespread are NPS?

According to the UNODC report “The challenge of new psychoactive substances”, NPS have become a global phenomenon and all regions of the world have been affected by it. 70 (out of 80) countries and territories surveyed (88%) reported the emergence of NPS.

How many NPS are there?

Number of newly identified new psychoactive substances at the global level: 2009 to mid-2012 (cumulative):



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime questionnaire on new psychoactive substances, 2012.

UNODC research found more than 250 substances, including ketamine, which were reported by Governments and laboratories around the world. This figure is greater than the 234 substances scheduled under the international drugs conventions. In February 2013, five new substances were reported by drug analysis laboratories. Technically, the number of potential derivatives is unlimited. As long as there is no global monitoring mechanism on such substances, information on them will remain inconsistent.

What is the legal situation?

NPS are not under international control. Many countries have established permanent control measures for some substances or issued temporary bans. Only a handful of NPS have been reviewed by the mechanism established under the international drugs conventions. Responses in this area are likely to be most effective if they are coordinated across countries and regions. NPS are also a challenge for prevention and treatment. Objective and credible information is needed. In this respect, it is particularly important to create risk awareness among young people. Prevention measures should also target experienced drug users.

How can I find out more about NPS?

UNODC has reviewed the appearance of NPS in global markets and issued the first global overview of information on these substances and their use as well as a list of the substances reported to it in 2012. The 2013 World Drug Report has also dedicated its Thematic Chapter to this issue. On the occasion of World Drug Day on 26th June 2013, a secure online Early Warning Advisory has been launched, to assist Member States in the identification of NPS. Further developments will follow providing policy-makers and experts with a knowledge hub on NPS.



UNODC

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World Drug Campaign

UNODC leads the global campaign to raise awareness about the major challenge that illicit drugs represent to society as a whole, and especially to the young. The goal of the campaign is to mobilize support and inspire people to act against drug use.

UNODC encourages as many awareness-raising activities as possible around the globe and invites individuals, non-profit organizations, the private sector and Member States to get involved by:

- Organizing outreach or institutional events to mark 26 June, the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking
- Spreading the word about the campaign through your own networks and contacts
- Using the campaign slogan and logo in promotional products, websites and social media
- Donating funds to your local NGO in support of drug prevention and treatment efforts, or making in-kind contributions to the campaign and related events

To learn more about the global campaign, visit:

www.unodc.org/drugs

www.facebook.com/unodc



Photos: University Medical Center Freiburg, Germany; Central Narcotics Bureau, Singapore; UNODC; Shutterstock.
Please note that the products (pills, cover and p.2; bath salt, cover) shown in the photos are simulated.