



NPS

New psychoactive substances



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

2020

NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

The rapid emergence of a large number of NPS on the global drug market poses a significant risk to public health and a challenge to drug policy. Often, little is known about the adverse health effects and social harms of NPS, which pose a considerable challenge for prevention and treatment. The analysis and identification of a large number of chemically diverse substances present in drug markets at the same time is demanding. Monitoring, information sharing, early warning and risk awareness are essential to respond to this situation.

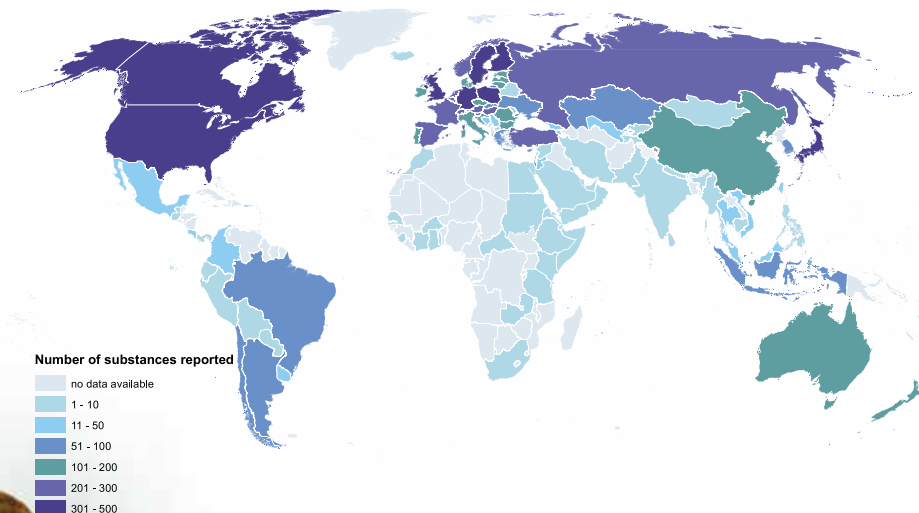
What are NPS?

NPS have been known in the market by terms such as “legal highs”, “bath salts” and “research chemicals”. UNODC 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 decades ago – but to substances that have recently become available on the market.

What are the risks of NPS?

The use of NPS is often linked to health problems. In general, side effects of NPS range from seizures to agitation, aggression, acute psychosis as well as potential development of dependence. NPS users have frequently been hospitalized with severe intoxications. Safety data on toxicity and carcinogenic potential of many NPS are not available or very limited, and information on long-term adverse effects or risks are still largely unknown. Purity and composition of products containing NPS are often not known, which

Global emergence of new psychoactive substances up to December 2019:



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Early Warning Advisory on NPS, 2019.

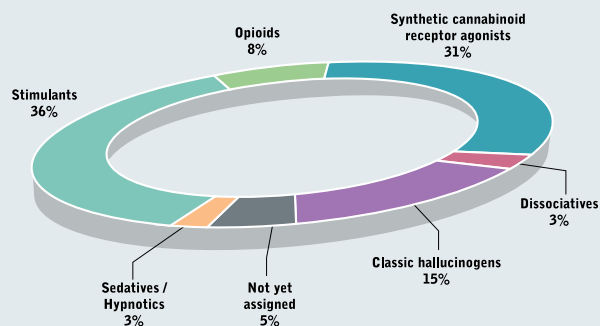


places users at high risk as evidenced by hospital emergency admissions and deaths associated with NPS, often including cases of poly-substance use.

How widespread are NPS?

NPS have become a global phenomenon with 120 countries and territories from all regions of the world having reported one or more NPS. Up to December 2019, more than 950 substances have been reported to the UNODC Early Warning Advisory (EWA) on NPS by Governments, laboratories and partner organisations. NPS available on the market have similar effects as substances under international control such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin, LSD, MDMA (ecstasy) or methamphetamine. Looking at the effects of synthetic NPS that have been reported until December 2019, the majority are stimulants, followed by synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists and classic hallucinogens with a notable increase in synthetic opioids in recent years.

Synthetic new psychoactive substances by effect group, up to December 2019



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Early Warning Advisory on NPS, 2019. Note: Percentage sum may exceed 100% due to rounding of decimals.

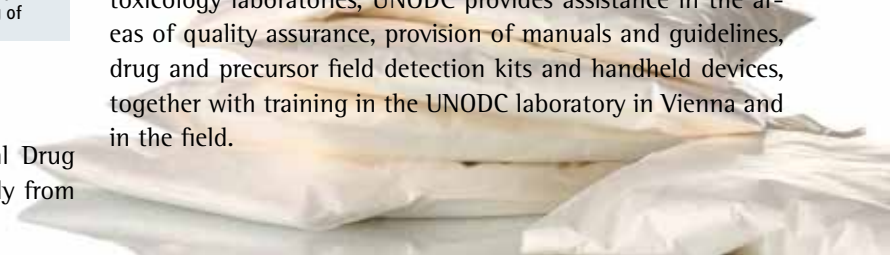
What is the legal situation of NPS?

Since NPS are not controlled under the International Drug Control Conventions, their legal status can differ widely from

country to country. Up to 2019, over 60 countries have implemented legal responses to control NPS, with many countries having used or amended existing legislation and others having used innovative legal instruments. Several countries where a large number of different NPS has rapidly emerged, have adopted controls on entire substance groups of NPS using a so-called generic approach, or have introduced analogue legislation that invokes the principal of “chemical similarity” to an already controlled substance to control substances not explicitly mentioned in the legislation. At the international level, up to March 2019, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided to place 48 NPS under international control. These control measures have to be implemented into the national legal framework of each country.

How is UNODC assisting Governments in this area?

To assist Member States in the identification and reporting of NPS, UNODC established the Early Warning Advisory (EWA) on NPS. The EWA serves as a repository of information on NPS leading to an improved understanding of their distribution and harm and provides a platform for the provision of technical assistance to Member States. Information in the EWA from drug seizures as well as drug identifications in biological fluid case-work enables a more comprehensive overview of the NPS landscape and allows to better understand health threats posed by NPS. Information from the EWA contributes to identifying the most harmful, persistent and prevalent NPS as an important step towards prioritizing NPS for international review in the framework of the International Drug Control Conventions. To assist the work of law enforcement, forensic drug testing and toxicology laboratories, UNODC provides assistance in the areas of quality assurance, provision of manuals and guidelines, drug and precursor field detection kits and handheld devices, together with training in the UNODC laboratory in Vienna and in the field.





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The UNODC Early Warning Advisory on NPS

Under the umbrella of its Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme and pursuant to resolutions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, UNODC developed the first international monitoring system on new psychoactive substances (NPS). The UNODC Early Warning Advisory (EWA) on NPS provides access to basic information on NPS for the public. Registered users can access specific information on NPS, including trend data, chemical, pharmacological and toxicological details of individual substances, supporting documentation for laboratory analysis and legislative responses by Member States.

To access the UNODC EWA on NPS, visit: www.unodc.org/nps
www.unodc.org/tox

Information on the Global SMART Programme can be found via the web: www.unodc.org/unodc/en/scientists/smart-new.html.

Please contact the Global SMART Programme: unodc-globalsmart@un.org.

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The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dashed lines represent undetermined boundaries. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

Photos: University Medical Center Freiburg, Germany; Central Narcotics Bureau, Singapore; United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); UNODC. Please note that some of the products shown in the photos are simulated.