

# The Novel Psychoactive Substances in the UK Project: empirical and conceptual review work to produce research recommendations

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## Plain English summary

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# Plain English summary

## What was the question?

Novel psychoactive substances (NPS) are new drugs, sometimes referred to as legal highs, that have recently received a lot of attention in the media and from governments across the world. We aimed to look at research on (1) what is known about who uses NPS, (2) what problems they experience and (3) what might be the best ways to reduce these problems. We also aimed to offer advice on what new research studies might be undertaken to better understand NPS in ways that help to improve the health of the public.

## What did we do?

Before looking at any studies, we developed ideas about what research might be useful to help understand a new problem such as this. We then looked at what studies have already been undertaken on NPS. To advise on what new research was needed, we tried to find gaps between research that has already been done and what we thought still needed to be done. We also recorded and used what researchers in this area had previously recommended.

## What did we find?

We found that there are many gaps in knowledge and that available research is at an early stage in understanding NPS. Reported side effects of using NPS include mental health, heart, liver and stomach problems. We made a number of recommendations on what new research we think should be done, and which of these research avenues we thought was most important.

## What does this mean?

Much remains to be known about NPS. We suggest that there is no justified reason for investigating NPS in isolation from other illicit drugs. We have presented some options for what new research could be undertaken in the future. We hope that this will help experts on NPS to decide together what research would be most helpful to reduce harms for people who already use NPS, those who might be affected by NPS and those who might use NPS in the future, in the interests of better health across society as a whole.

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