

Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System (DAMIS)

Activity report

October 2014 - March 2015

Background

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to find out about emerging trends in drug and alcohol misuse, so we can act quickly and provide relevant information or advice to those who misuse drugs or alcohol.

The kind of information DAMIS collects includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs becoming available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects

The DHSSPS oversee DAMIS with support from the lead partners: the Public Health Agency, the Department of Justice and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

As at April 2015, DAMIS has an email circulation list of 285 individuals. Unless otherwise stated, information sent out by DAMIS is emailed to all those on the list. People can be added to this list by emailing a request to damis@hscni.net.

Anyone can send in information to DAMIS. It should be emailed to damis@hscni.net.

The following tables summarize key information received by DAMIS, and circulated by DAMIS, in the 6 months from October 2014 to March 2015. If you would like further information on anything listed here, please contact damis@hscni.net

Information received by DAMIS during October 2014 – March 2015

Information received by DAMIS is shown in the table below:

Emails received by DAMIS October 2014 – March 2015	
Date	Topic
20 th October	“Trippy” synthetic cannabinoid widely used in Southern Trust area, with psychological withdrawal extreme and longer-lasting than other synthetic drugs.
5 th November	Addiction Services client with polydrug use (including injecting mephedrone and diphenidrine) had a stroke.
11 th November	Drug sold as a synthetic cannabinoid, believed to be called “sky blue”, linked to a number of people staying in a hostel in Belfast requiring emergency medical treatment
12 th November	Relates to above. Drug may be called “sky high” or “sky’s the limit”
24 th November	Users report pills sold as Ecstasy on the streets in Derry, with the names <i>Green Heineken</i> , <i>Gold Bar</i> , and <i>Chubba Chubba</i> have led to higher levels of anxiety / depression than expected (more information was requested)
28 th November	White heroin sold as cocaine in Amsterdam
10 th December	Unknown stimulant led to psychotic type state in user in Southern Trust area
10 th December	Increased levels of MDMA in ecstasy pills in a number of European countries
24 th December	Deaths in Sweden associated with Bonzai Citrus / Bonzai Winter Boost
5 th January	Superman pills containing lethal amounts of PMMA found in Netherlands, and linked to deaths in England
30 th January	Botulism linked to injecting drug users hospitalised in Scotland
9 th February	UPS ecstasy tablets seized in Europe found to contain very high levels of MDMA
10 th February	UPS tablets seized in a number of areas in Northern Ireland
18 th February	“Trippy weed” linked to hospitalisation of 2 girls in Southern Trust area
25 th February	2 people believed to have been hospitalised after smoking unknown substance (believed by users to be sky blue / sky high)
27 th February	Unknown oily liquid (possible GHB; GBL) led to unconsciousness in user
3 rd March	Heineken tablets in England believed to contain very high levels of MDMA
9 th March	Unknown bright yellow powder (believed by user to be mephedrone) causing strong adverse effects and leading to addiction
12 th March	Report of “blue sky” in Belfast area being very potent, and user having seizure
20 th March	Report of young person being admitted to Emergency Department with potentially life threatening symptoms after using “blue sky”.

Information circulated by DAMIS during October 2014 – March 2015

In the majority of the above cases, more information was sought either from the original informant, or from other experts in the field (Addictions staff, Homeless staff and drug users) and DAMIS partners continue to monitor the situation. In some cases, information was sent to specific groups, for example GP Practices, or Needle Exchange Providers.

In some cases, information was considered to be of sufficient urgency for it to be circulated to the full DAMIS database. Information circulated to the full DAMIS database is shown in the table below:

Emails circulated by DAMIS to the full DAMIS database <i>October 2014 – March 2015</i>		
Date	Topic	Nature of email
13 th November	Sky blue / sky high alert and synthetic cannabinoids factsheet	Warning over synthetic cannabinoids
28 th November	White heroin Amsterdam	Warning over white heroin being sold as cocaine
2 December	Ecstasy	Ecstasy linked to severe comedowns and suicidal thoughts
2 January	Botulism	Cases of Botulism in injecting drug users in Glasgow
6 January	Superman logo tablets	May contain lethal doses of PMMA
10 th February	UPS logo tablets	May contain very high doses of MDMA
13 th March	Sky blue / sky high alert and synthetic cannabinoids factsheet	Warning over synthetic cannabinoids

Additional awareness raising

In addition to the DAMIS alert on botulism on 2nd January, the Chief Medical Officer issued a CMO Alert to key medical staff <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss-md-1-2015.pdf>

Reports of UPS logo ecstasy pills containing very high levels of MDMA, along with a number of PSNI seizures of such tablets, were considered of sufficient urgency for the Public Health Agency to issue a press release on this topic on 12th February.

The PHA is in ongoing discussions with partners around the potential need for further awareness raising around synthetic cannabinoids.