

ru-ok? Briefing – March 2021

Newsflash (health warnings and other news):

- **Festivals:** There have been concerns raised this month over the increased risk of overdose this summer, once restrictions are eased, due to lower tolerance levels.
[Festivals: 'Grave concerns' over drug safety this summer - BBC News](#)
- **Cannabis:** “Det Ch Supt Lisa Mahon said the items had been “clearly designed to appeal to younger people, which is worrying to see”.
[Liverpool boy arrested over cannabis 'made to look like sweets' - BBC News](#)
- **Sexual Health Education:** With the rise in women’s voices being heard, there have been greater discussions about sexual health education for all young people and advice on when this should start.
[How to teach young people about sex and relationships – by the experts | UK news | The Guardian](#)
- **County Lines:** What we can do better, according to families and services working with young people exploited into drug supply and violent offending.
https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/county-lines-police-social-services-gaps_uk_6033d0a8c5b66dfc10205db8?fbclid=IwAR0J1vFuXbxwh4vscdN1ColH015nvn9PmsKlv-AohJQ3-OdynxiDo9c0NY
- **Alcohol:** Research shows how the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the mental health of young people, but also shows a decrease in alcohol consumption was identified in this cohort.
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/03/210322112907.htm>

Current Trends:

Use of **Sneak Energy** caffeine drinks has been a common trend this month. Sneak is a low-calorie, sugar-free energy drink and is available in powders or cans.

One serving contains 150mg of caffeine and the website states “that you can safely consume up to two servings of Sneak per day”. Recommended caffeine consumption for 13 – 18yr olds is max 100mg per day and therefore one Sneak would contain too much caffeine for an adolescent.

This product is marketed in a way that can be appealing to teenagers. This includes a strong Instagram presence, merchandise and cartoon branding with a graffiti effect – we have to admit it looks cool! The brand offers opportunities to become a brand ambassador via gaming sites popular with young people, such as Fortnite and Rocket League. Sneak describes itself as a low-calorie product with amino acids, vitamins, and minerals, implying some health benefits to consuming this energy drink. It also provides incentives to bulk buy caffeinated products.

We currently do not know if this is an issue but due to the marketing and lack of clear advice, we feel it could be a cause for concern regarding teen usage. Caffeine is legal but can be detrimental to under 18's.

We are hearing about **Speed** again from our young people. Speed is a long-lasting synthetic stimulant, otherwise known as amphetamine. It can appear off-white, yellow, or pinkish powder or paste. It is most commonly snorted or dabbled. Effects of speed, when snorted, can take up to 30 minutes to appear and can last for 4-8 hours. After-effects may be felt for up to 12 hours. Speed may make you feel energetic and confident. It also increases your heart rate and breathing. People taking it may experience a strong urge to re-dose as well as increased alertness, concentration, motivation and sex drive and a decreased appetite and desire to sleep. Other effects include jaw clenching, restlessness, aggression, psychosis, dependence and paranoia. As a strong stimulant, it can cause serious harm to heart function and mental health.

Children's Emergency Department and ru-ok? stats:

In February 2021, 14 patients aged 14 to 17 were reported to have attended A&E due to alcohol, cannabis, LSD, benzodiazepines, ketamine, unknown substances and sexual health needs. Each was offered an appointment with ru-ok? for support and advice on how to stay safer in the future.

ru-ok? Briefing – March 2021

Theme of the Month: TOLERANCE

March has been quite a readjustment for young people. The transition from staying at home to going back to school with lots of new regulations plus contact with more people can be tough. As GCSE and 'A' Level exams were cancelled, this has created mixed feelings in young people. Some have welcomed this change. Others are concerned, especially if their attendance and performance has been impacted by the lockdown restrictions. These pressures have been reported as a significant factor in the increased use of substances by some young people locally. There is a sense of hopelessness and lack of clarity for the future, which for many young people increases the anxiety and fear of 'what next' that teenagers often have to deal with.

One young person reported that they feel they have no future now. They said they fear that there will be no jobs for young people because the pandemic made many qualified people unemployed. Education and housing are too expensive. This despair for their future led them to start using benzodiazepines. Although the benzos helped reduce the panic, it increased anxiety and risk taking. They were able to observe this in themselves and have now slowly withdrawn from them. However, the anxiety for the future remains. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon reflection from the people we are working with.

With the "road map" of lifting restrictions, there is hope but also perhaps a sense of 'what have we got to lose'. It has lifted the spirits of many young people, but there could be concerns of them "over doing" it with drugs and alcohol when they are allowed to have gatherings again. Research shows there has been a general decrease in young people in the UK consuming alcohol during the lockdown, so tolerance levels may have also decreased. Where many have been abstinent of all drugs for some time, it is important that young people who use substances are equipped with the below harm reduction knowledge to help them make safer informed decisions:

- Do research from reputable websites such as Talk to Frank or Drugs and Me. What is bought is not always what people think it is and often can cause harm.
- Test if possible. Even if the test shows it is the drug expected, this will not show strength.
- Plan ahead – ensure there is money and options to get home safely.
- Have a good meal and hydrate well before drinking alcohol. Drink water in between alcoholic drinks.
- **Dose low and go slow.** Do a dab test. Does it taste like it should? After half an hour or so (drug dependent) is there any effect?
- **Returning to previous levels of use** could cause serious harm, after a break from using. Acting as if it is their first time, with caution, could reduce harm.
- Avoid double dosing. If there is no effect from a drug, it could be that it is something other than what the buyer expected. This could be something more harmful that takes longer to affect the system. Double dosing has caused fatal overdoses every year. Wait 2 hours minimum before redosing.
- Avoid mixing different drugs including alcohol and medicines as this can cause dangerous, unintended or unpredictable effects.
- If drinking alcohol, use a measuring cup or spirit measure so you know how many units you are having.
- Alcohol/drugs can cause nausea and vomiting – if someone seems asleep, make sure they are breathing and place them in the recovery position to avoid them choking. Keep checking on them.
- Vomiting can reduce the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill – use alternative methods to avoid unintended pregnancy.
- Call 999 and ask for an ambulance if there are any signs of an overdose: confusion, overheating, unconsciousness (won't wake with a shout or a shake), severe nausea and vomiting, fitting, difficulty breathing, snoring/raspy breathing, blue/pale tingeing of knees/hands/lips, slow or erratic pulse (heartbeat), pale, cold and clammy skin.

If you have any concerns about a young person's drug or alcohol use, contact Brighton & Hove's U18s substance use and sexual health service (ru-ok? inc DASH) which provides confidential support, advice and guidance to young people, their families, carers, friends and professionals, alongside treatment programmes for young people identifying problems arising from substance use and/or sexual health. A duty worker is available weekdays from 2 pm – 5 pm (4:30 on Fridays)

ru-ok? details: ru-ok? is on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook sharing useful information around drugs, alcohol and sexual health. Please follow us. Contact us at ru-ok? Tel: 01273 293966 or 07795 336436 or email Luci.Hammond@brighton-hove.gov.uk or RUOKDB@brighton-hove.gov.uk.

We would love your feedback!