



Advisory notice by HSE Social Inclusion on new combinations of substances being sold as benzodiazepines to the Irish Drug Market (1st May 2020)

In December 2019, HSE Social Inclusion circulated an advisory note to services in Ireland in relation to a concern around the emergence of new benzodiazepines or fake tablets onto the Irish market. These substances were being sold as 'Xanax' (trade name for a preparation of alprazolam) or 'Xanax bars/sticks' and were found to contain a variety of substances including Flualprazolam which is one of the Novel benzodiazepines recently emerged in Europe.

Over the last decade, the EU Early Warning System on new psychoactive substances (NPS) has detected an increasing number of 'new' benzodiazepines in Europe's drug market. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) is currently monitoring 28 new benzodiazepines. Some 23 of these have been first detected in Europe over the last 5 years.

NPS benzodiazepines appearing on the market are of concern due to high potency at low doses. Risks are increased if one or more substances are used by the person, or if tablets are pressed to contain one or more substance.

Flualprazolam is a potent substance which has sedative effects similar to other benzodiazepines but with much higher potency and a relatively short onset of action, similar to alprazolam (Xanax).

Since that time the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) in the UK has produced a review of the evidence of use and harms of novel benzodiazepines. This review includes the drug flualprazolam among 13 novel benzodiazepines that they considered. They noted that flualprazolam had been associated with 12 deaths in the UK and that all of the substances considered had the potential to cause harm if they emerged onto the drug market in the UK.

They recommended that 3 of the substances that had been seized in the UK, (Flualprazolam, Flunitrazolam and Norfludiazepam) would be placed under Schedule 1 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 2001, as they had no medicinal use. The full report and recommendations arising from the report is available [here](#).

In light of this new report and recent reports in the media in Ireland concerning tablets/substances that may have been implicated in overdose deaths, the National Social Inclusion Office is asking managers to disseminate this note and the attached poster to services in conjunction with the

updated [information on Overdose Awareness](#) that has been developed as part of the response to the Covid-19 crisis and the ACMD report above.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Eamon Keenan

National Clinical Lead – HSE Addiction Services

Recommended resources:

Download the overdose and COVID-19 poster [here](#)

Drug Watch Factsheet, [Alprazolam](#)

International Overdose Awareness Day: [Depressant overdose factsheet](#)

International Overdose Awareness Day: [Depressant overdose poster](#)

McNamara, Sinead and Stokes, Siobhan and Nolan, J (2019), [The emergence of New Psychoactive Substance \(NPS\) benzodiazepines. A survey of their prevalence in opioid substitution patients using LC-MS](#). Irish Medical Journal , 112 , (7) , pp. 970-976

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2019), [European Drug Report 2019: Trends and Developments](#), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2018) [Perspectives on drugs, The misuse of benzodiazepines among high-risk opioid users in Europe](#).

Coronavirus COVID-19



Coronavirus
COVID-19
Public Health
Advice

Drug overdose and Coronavirus (COVID-19) It's an extra risky time. It's safer not to use drugs at all.

There are new risks during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Changes to the drug market could increase your overdose risk.



You are at greater risk of drug overdose if you have COVID-19.



Avoid using more than one drug at a time: this includes using with alcohol and prescription medication like methadone or benzodiazepines.



You can't be sure of the contents of drugs or how you will react: tablets not prescribed to you are also a risk.



Tolerance: not taking drugs for a space of time and starting again could lead to overdose.



Changing the type of drugs you use or using new drugs increases your risk of overdose.



Think about Opioid Substitution Treatment. This could help you manage your use and reduce overdose. Call your local HSE Drug and Alcohol service for further information.



Using alone or in isolation is dangerous: let someone know.



Get Naloxone for you or a friend. This could save your life.



Start very low and go very slow and leave at least two hours before using more.

Don't be afraid to get help if you or a friend becomes unwell after using drugs
It's important you get medical support as soon as possible by calling 999 or 112

The HSE Drug and Alcohol Helpline is available Monday-Friday 9:30 am-5:30 pm
on 1800 459 459 for information and support

DRUGS.ie
Drug and Alcohol Information and Support



Riádas na hÉireann
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Download the overdose and COVID-19 poster [here](#)