



Today, there is an alarming new drug problem; demand has soared for substances not under international control. Therefore, the [2013 UNODC global awareness campaign](#) "**Make health your 'new high' in life, not drugs**

" aims to inform the public, and particularly young people, about the harmful effects of new psychoactive substances (NPS). Sold openly, including through the internet, these substances, which have not been tested for safety in humans, can be far more dangerous than traditional drugs.

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Marketed as 'legal highs', "research chemicals", "plant food" and "bath salts," NPS are proliferating at an unprecedented rate. The use of these terms gives a semblance of legality misleading young people into believing that they are indulging in low-risk fun. Intentional mislabelling of some NPS as "not for human consumption" provides a way of evading drug control laws.

The sheer number of NPS arriving on the scene almost weekly compounded by the lack of understanding of the adverse effects and addictive potential of these uncontrolled substances presents a major public health challenge. Often, the difference between a 'safe' and toxic dose is marginal and NPS have been associated with fatalities, delirium and violent behaviour. Mixtures of NPS bought unknowingly by users have resulted in unpredictable and sometimes disastrous effects.

Everyone has a part to play in protecting the youth of the world from dangerous substances. UNODC leads the annual World Drug Campaign to drive home the message that illicit drugs pose a danger to society, aims to mobilize wide public support and seeks to inspire people to act against drug abuse.

Secretary General's message:

This year I visited the San Patrignano drug rehabilitation centre in northern Italy where more than 1,200 young women and men from 28 countries are learning how to free themselves from the curse of addiction and enjoy dignified, productive lives. Their road is not easy. It demands courage, commitment and the compassion of dedicated mentors. But the members of this inspiring community understand that they are fortunate. All over the world, drugs threaten the health and welfare of youth and children, families and communities, and the billions of dollars generated by the drugs trade feed corruption, enhance the power of criminal networks and create fear and instability.

Illegal drug trafficking is a clear obstacle to development. This cross-border problem requires a robust and coordinated law enforcement response within and among countries. Tackling organized crime and the illicit drugs trade is a shared responsibility. But the rule of law is only part of the equation. For instance, farmers dependent on the cultivation of illicit drugs such as coca, marijuana and opium must be offered alternative livelihoods, while drug users and addicts need help not stigmatization.

A human rights and science-based public health approach is the only sound basis for preventing and treating addiction and related consequences such as HIV transmission through unsafe injecting practices. We must also address threats such as the emerging problem of new psychoactive substances, many of which are not under international control. Young people, in particular, must be made aware of the dangers of these drugs.

On this International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, I call on governments, the media and civil society to do everything possible to raise awareness of the harm caused by illicit drugs and to help prevent people profiting from their use.

Additional links:

- [UNODC](#)
- [World Drug Campaign](#)
- [World Drug Report 2013](#)
- [Media Advisory World Drug Report 2013](#)