

Many mephedrone alternatives just as risky, warn experts

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Since the recent ban on mephedrone, many so-called "legal substitutes" available on the internet are in fact banned cathinones (chemically related to amphetamines) and just as risky, warn experts in a letter to this week's *BMJ*.

One such product is Energy 1 (NRG-1), also advertised as naphyrone (naphthylpyrovalerone, O-2482), write Simon Brandt and colleagues. These products are offered as legal substitutes for the recently criminalised "legal highs," the mephedrone derivatives.

Previous studies exploring the motivation for using these drugs suggested that consumers think that they are more likely to be of higher purity than street drugs, carry a lower risk of physical harm, and not be liable for the criminal sanctions associated with drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

To obtain an initial snapshot of the post-ban situation, they purchased 17 products online from 12 UK based websites over the six weeks after the ban on mephedrone in mid-April 2010. Chemical analysis was carried out by established procedures.

They found that most of the NRG-type products were recently banned cathinones that just carried a new label. This suggests that both consumers and online sellers are, most likely without knowledge, at risk of criminalisation and potential harm, they say.

They conclude: "This has important health and criminal justice consequences that will require carefully thought out responses and further investigation."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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