

# INFORMATION BRIEFING

## SPICE



### The Citywide response to Spice use in Sheffield

Spice use needs a co-ordinated response. Our vision is that all workers in contact with Spice users will have the opportunity to respond to Spice use in a number of ways. You may respond to an emergency, you may want to contact the police to discuss dealing or suspected dealing, you may want to deliver harm reduction messages and you may want to discuss starting or continuing with drug treatment with people using Spice.

In order to do this we want a consistent approach from Sheffield agencies to maximise the impact of this work.

### As a worker in contact with spice users what can I do?

In order to do this workers need to understand the following: what spice is, the legal position, the impact on the person and the citywide response, and become confident in its delivery.

To help workers to do this we have created this information briefing, created a 2 page response guidance leaflet for all workers to follow and have up to 400 training places available.

### What is Spice?

Spice is the nickname used in Sheffield for an herbal substance which has been coated in a synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonist (or SCRA for short). Spice is the most used nickname for the drug, however in some cities it has the nickname 'black mamba' (e.g. Nottingham and Birmingham). Spice is sold in small bags; it looks like a small bag of mixed herbs and is usually mixed with tobacco and smoked in a roll up.



### Is Spice illegal?

Yes - The Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 made spice illegal to sell, manufacture, import and export. In December 2016 the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was amended and made most Synthetic Cannabinoids and all Synthetic Cannabinoids most commonly found in Spice Class 'B' substances and Spice therefore became illegal to possess at that point.

### Is all Spice the same?

If you look at a bag of Spice, you may think they are all the same however there are over 200 forms of SCRA's (a slight change in the chemical make up of the SCRA creates a new SCRA) and in Sheffield all SCRA's are given the generic term 'Spice'. New SCRA's are being created all the time, meaning batches of Spice can differ week by week, month by month. Slight chemical changes can result in changes in the potency of the drug and a difference in the

severity of the side effects. A further factor that impacts on the impact of the drug on the body is the method by which it is made.

### How is Spice made?

SCRAs are manufactured substances which have usually been created abroad and then purchased on the internet. A SCRA is mixed with liquid acetone, then sprayed over an herbal plant e.g. thyme leaves and the leaves are then mixed to coat them in the SCRA.

The strength of Spice can vary for several reasons including the number of SCRAs contained in the liquid drug, the quantity (the amount of acetone content to SCRA) and how effectively the SCRA liquid drug has been mixed into the leaves. A 1-gram bag may have a little SCRA on it and a second bag from the same batch a lot. All these factors impact on the side effects and potency of the drug.

### Why do people use Spice?

Spice is cheap to make, cheap to buy compared to other illicit drugs and gives a significant 'hit'. It is also difficult to detect; it looks like people are smoking tobacco, it does not show on drug tests (unlike opiates) and some say it has no smell (although some workers say it smells fishy; which is the acetone that smells as it is smoked). All these factors can make it appealing for the most vulnerable in society; current drug users (it is often sold by dealers of other drugs), the homeless and those with accommodation issues and prisoners.

### How much does it cost to buy?

In Sheffield the price of Spice is not dissimilar to the areas of the country - it is relatively cheap buy. It is usually sold in 1g bags costing £5. However it can also be bought in bulk, by the half an ounce (or 14 grams) for around £45 which is then often 'shared' between peers. It is half the price of skunk cannabis.

### Why are the effects of Spice so strong?

SCRAs are strong. When it was first manufactured about five years ago spice was around 8 times stronger than cannabis, however this changed as the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of Spice was created which was around 100 times stronger than cannabis. The latest generation of spice is the '3<sup>rd</sup> generation' which is now up to 800 times more potent than cannabis. However, despite being a synthetic cannabinoid, Spice does not actually have the same effects as smoking cannabis.

### Tolerance

The body rapidly builds up tolerance to an SCRA, people can go from trying it out to feeling completely physically dependent in a very short period (e.g. days). This means users increase the amount of Spice they are using rapidly. Those who are addicted almost chain smoke it, often using within 15-20 minutes of the immediate side effects wearing off. Those who are highly dependent on Spice even wake in the night to use the drug; the side effects are so severe.

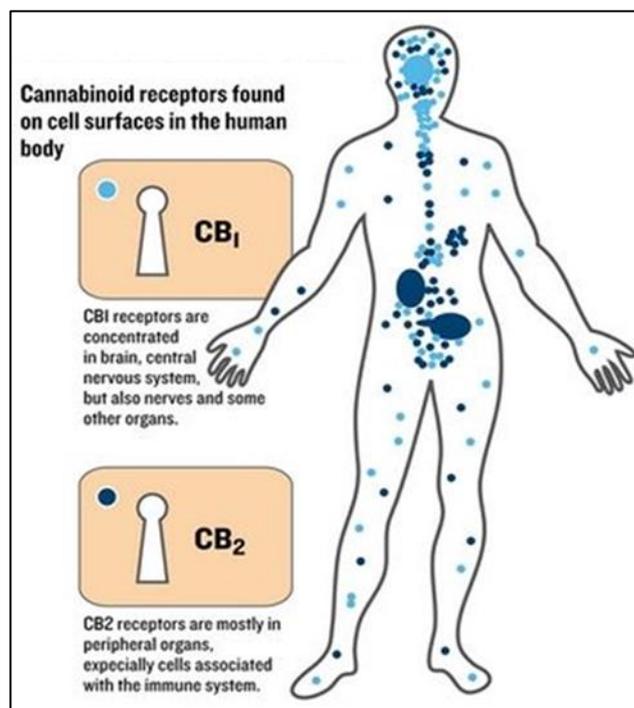
More science...understand tolerance – The body's tolerance increases to each chemical form of SCRA, therefore if a different batch contains a different SCRA, then there is no 'cross-

tolerance' meaning that the hit is different, and the body builds up a new tolerance to this new chemical SCRA. For users this is seen as a 'good thing', as chasing the first 'hit' is drug use is often heard about and this is the experience with Spice, with each new chemical form of SCRA used.

### What does it do to the body? Warning...more science bit

Spice is often compared to cannabis because both contain cannabinoids, and both affect the same two types of receptors – CB1 and CB2 found in the body. CB1 receptors are mainly found in the brain and CB2 receptors are mainly found in the immune system which is located all over the body.

The difference between cannabis and SCRA is that cannabis contains natural cannabinoids, including THC whilst Spice contains manufactured cannabinoids. This means they impact on the same CB1 and CB2 receptors in a different way. Spice having a greater and stronger impact on the body. For example, when cannabis is smoked the THC content is released into the body and partially clings (a partial agonist) to the CB1 and CB2 receptors whereas SCRA totally cling (they are fully agonists) to the CB1 and CB2 receptors.



This means SCRA affect both the brain and the physical body – for example think of the most often used phrase for Spice users: the term 'zombie'. In this state users are both physically unable to function and are also unable to communicate either.

### What are the side effects of using Spice?

Users experience a variety of side effects – the full effects are experienced quickly after using, often within seconds, and then decline after around 30 minutes after use, although some SCRA can remain in the body for a few hours.

### The mental effects of spice

Spice changes a user's behaviour. Users can experience a range of symptoms – including frightening visions or hallucinations, become anxious, irritable and have psychosis-like effects, have inappropriate or uncontrolled laughter, feel anger, sadness, and experience depression, panic attacks and have suicidal thoughts.

### ...and why users become aggressive...

They can become agitated, feel combativeness, aggression, become paranoid, have delusions, experience changes in perception and experience acute psychosis.

Short-term memory and cognitive deficits can be affected –users can become confused, look sedated, block their thoughts, experience nonsensical speech and amnesia - this is seen as one of the benefits for users who want to forget the ‘now’ and block out memories, current life experiences and difficulties.

The physical effects of spice

Spice users may experience a range of physical symptoms. Symptoms are influenced by a range of reasons including the strength and potency of the SCRA, tolerance to the SCRA, other drugs and substances they have also used or medication they are using, their own health issues, and time duration since they last used spice.

Spice users may experience the following symptoms after using spice		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a tight chest,</li> <li>• a racing &amp; irregular pulse,</li> <li>• have breathing difficulties,</li> <li>• headaches,</li> <li>• collapse,</li> <li>• have dizziness,</li> <li>• numbness</li> <li>• vomit</li> <li>• Seizures,</li> <li>• cardiac toxicity,</li> <li>• sympathomimetic toxidrome (poisoning),</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chest pain,</li> <li>• heart attack,</li> <li>• renal injury,</li> <li>• hypertension,</li> <li>• unconsciousness,</li> <li>• skin rashes,</li> <li>• bleeding from the eyes and other orifices,</li> <li>• teeth falling out,</li> <li>• weight loss &amp; loss of appetite,</li> <li>• amnesia</li> </ul>	

Contact with the ambulance service - Research conducted in Sheffield during April 2018 calculated that of the 180 workers in contact with spice users had contacted the ambulance service around 170 times in one month. Knowing when and how to contact the ambulance service is important when working with spice users. See the 2 page step by step worker guide on what to do with each symptom presented.

A key message from the ambulance service is to **never place the spice user on their back, but always to place in the recovery position**. Only when the worker is next to the Spice user and on the phone to the ambulance service and told by the 999 caller to place on the back to start performing lifesaving CPR. At all other times the recovery position should be used.

Emergency hospital admissions - Around one user per day is seen in the resuscitation unit in the A&E department in Sheffield due to the side effects of spice (April 2018).

Can people die from using Spice?

Yes. In a minority of cases, Spice use can result in death. The number of deaths associated to SCRA use increased nationally between 2015 and 2016 when 8 and 27 deaths respectively

were recorded as herbal NPS drug related deaths by the Office of National Statistics. There are no confirmed deaths in Sheffield due to Spice use.

What symptoms do people have who are addicted?

A recent survey with Spice users in Sheffield observed that frequent users of Spice (daily users) reported having experienced all side effects, had problems sleeping and could not stop using Spice.

Do Spice users use other drugs and what is the impact?

Our recent survey found over two thirds of Spice users were using other drugs as well and over 20% used with other drugs and alcohol.

Spice users who use other illegal and prescribed medication are likely to have more problematic and more complex side effects.

Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) have explained that any side effects experienced and observed should not be assumed to be due to Spice use, indeed other health conditions and other drugs (illicit and / or prescribed) also need to be factored in and may be unknown to the observer.

Can people be treated for their Spice use?

Yes, the drug treatment services in Sheffield provide a range of treatments for Spice users. Whilst there is no substitute medication regime, harm reduction, health advice, comprehensive assessment, brief interventions and onward referral to psycho social interventions and pharmacological interventions (where indicated) are available.

Does Spice treatment work?

There is limited academic and clinical research completed into this area, however we know that some Sheffield users of Spice have stopped using spice following support from the treatment services.

Do harm reduction message work?

Yes, we know of a number of users who have also reduced their Spice use following brief interventions and harm reduction advice. Our survey has found that the same harm reduction message can be delivered to different users and some will listen and others will not. This doesn't mean don't deliver harm reduction messages. It may just mean the user needs to be in the right contemplation stage in the Cycle of Change to be ready to listen and act on the messages. If over 400 workers and over 45 organisations in the city can deliver the same 10 harm reduction messages to all users of spice they care in contact with, as and when the opportunity presents, it is more likely users will start to listen and reduce their Spice use.

**THE CITYWIDE RESPONSE TO SPICE – SEE NEXT TWO PAGES**

This contains the key messages and information that all workers should know and use when working with users of spice.

## THE SHEFFIELD CITYWIDE RESPONSE TO SPICE

<b>The SPICE Overdose Response Guide for Professionals</b> <span style="color: red; font-weight: bold;">Remember in an emergency always phone 999</span>		
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Unconsciousness</b></p> <p>If a person can't be woken by gentle shaking and calling, or you notice a blueness of the skin, including lips or fingernails (or greyish with paler lips for darker complexions).</p> <p><b>Action</b> - Make sure they are <b>lying on their side</b> so they don't choke on vomit.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 999 and listen to instructions</b></p> </div>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Breathing difficulties</b></p> <p>Not breathing</p> <p><b>Action</b> - If there is no breathing or it is ineffective, abnormal, then CPR should be attempted. <b>Phone 999 and listen to instructions</b></p> <p>Fast breathing rate, not settling within 5 minutes.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 999 and listen to instructions</b></p> </div>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Seizures</b></p> <p><b>Convulsion similar to an epileptic fit.</b></p> <p><b>Action</b> - Make sure the area is safe and there is nothing they could hurt themselves on. Call an ambulance. Inform paramedics if the fit stops and starts, if it doesn't stop within a couple of minutes or if the person turns blue.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 999 and listen to instructions.</b></p> </div>
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Temperature over 38.5°C</b></p> <p>Not settling after about 5 minutes of rest or, if no thermometer is available, if very flushed and feels very hot.</p> <p><b>Action</b> – If they are overheating: Cool them down by removing outer clothing, fan them, use a wet cloth on their skin, take them outside or somewhere cool. If they are conscious allow them to sip water or a non-alcoholic drink.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 999 and listen to instructions</b></p> </div>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Severe chest pains</b></p> <p><b>Action</b> - Sit them down in a calm environment and reassure them.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 999</b></p> </div>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Vomiting/feeling unwell</b></p> <p>Vomiting is nature's way of saying you've had too much.</p> <p><b>Action</b> - Don't give them anything to eat and only let them drink water. If after vomiting they want to sleep, let them. Make sure they are lying on their side (the recovery position). Monitor the person and call 111 if required.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 111 if required and listen to instructions</b></p> </div>
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Hallucinations</b></p> <p>Blabbering, incoherent, zombie-like behaviour, panic attacks, repetitive nonsensical actions are common when using Spice.</p> <p><b>Action</b> - Take them somewhere quiet where they feel safe. Remember risk management (keep your self safe). Make eye contact, build trust. Calm and reassure them. If they become panicky and you notice them breathing very fast, get them to control their breathing. Monitor the person and call 111 if required.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 111, if an emergency this will trigger 999</b></p> </div>	<p><b><u>GUIDANCE NOTES</u></b></p> <p>This guide is aimed primarily at non-medical professionals.</p> <p>In all drugs cases it is advisable <b>to treat the symptoms and not the drug</b>. Remember multiple drugs may have been used, people may not have taken the drug(s) they think they have and they may have other health related problems.</p> <p><b>In an emergency always phone 999 and listen to instructions</b></p> <p><b>Remember risk management, keep yourself safe</b></p>	
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Spice Intoxication</b></p> <p>People who have used Spice may act in a disturbing way, be unsteady and appear 'zombie-like' with pale skin and pink eyes. They will be confused, unable to communicate properly and may repeat actions, as short term memory is severely affected. In the vast majority of cases people will not require emergency treatment.</p> <p><b>Action</b> – Monitor the person and call 111 if required.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Call 111, if emergency this will trigger 999</b></p> </div>		
<p>Amended by Sheffield City Council working with the Yorkshire Ambulance Service                  Permission from Mike Linnell, Linnell Communications, <a href="http://michaellinnell.org.uk">http://michaellinnell.org.uk</a></p>		



Local information for professionals in contact with users of spice in Sheffield		
<b>When do I need to involve the police?</b>		
Dealing of spice can be from an independent dealer (in the traditional sense) but spice dealing also takes place amongst groups of users. For example an individual has access to money and buys in bulk and then shares/ sells amongst his peers. This is also dealing.		
If you suspect or witness spice dealing	Call 101	
To report dealing on network rail or station	Call 0822 405040 OR Text 61016	
If you have access to the Business Crime Portal you can also report as a police incident		
<b>Harm Reduction</b>		
Spice is a highly addictive, toxic drug that may lead to death. The <u>top ten</u> has been created to reduce some of the risks for those already using Spice and provide consistent messages to users. It needs to be emphasised that there is no safe way to use Spice. Spice users should be advised to seek help.		
<b>The Top Ten Harm Reduction Messages</b>		
1. <b>Spice is illegal</b>	As of December 2016 most cannabinoids classified under the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act are Class B substances.	
2. <b>Spice is addictive</b>	It is both psychologically and physically addictive and may be as problematic as any of the traditional substances.	
3. <b>There is no safe way to use Spice</b>	It may be 100's of times more potent than Cannabis. Spice is more potent, more unpredictable and more dangerous.	
4. <b>Start with a very small dose</b>	Use a match head size amount or less. Test every batch because of the hugely varying potency.	
5. <b>Try not to use alone</b>	Spice is unpredictable; you never know when you may need someone to summon help.	
6. <b>Avoid using Spice with other Substances</b>	Including alcohol, prescribed or over the counter medications. These may interact negatively with the spice and may lead to an increased risk of overdose.	
7. <b>Sit down before use</b>	Sit down to avoid falls, trips and collapse. If you are sit down and collapse after use, there is less height to fall.	
8. <b>Try to smoke Spice with tobacco</b>	As opposed to neat. Avoid using pipes, bongs or vapourisers. Smoked neat or by one of the other methods will increase to an increased risk of overdose	
9. <b>Allow the effects to wear off before using more</b>	Give a good 20-30 minutes to recover before you start to use again. If you start using too soon, there is a higher amount of drugs in your body already and means the affects may lead to an increased risk of overdose.	
10. <b>Be aware of the powders at the bottom of a bag</b>	Crystals that fall off the plant and collect in the bottom of the bag are likely to be far more potent/concentrated	
<b>The Sheffield Spice Treatment Pathway</b>		
<b>Adults / Over 18s</b>  <b>Open access / drop in / no appointment required</b>  	If the person is <u>already in</u> treatment for opiate use at the Fitzwilliam Centre.	<b>SHSC / START, 143-145 Fitzwilliam Street, Sheffield, S1 4JP</b> <b>Drop in available or Telephone - 0114 30 50 500</b>
	If the person is <u>not already</u> in drug treatment at the Fitzwilliam Centre  If <u>you do not know if the person</u> is already in drug treatment	<b>SHSC / START, Non-Opiate service, 44 Sidney Street, Sheffield S1 4RH</b> <b>Drop in available or Telephone - 0114 272 1481 or 0114 30 50 500</b>
<b>Under 18s</b>  <b>Appointment only</b>  	<b>The Corner</b> - A free and confidential drug and alcohol service for young people using substances, aged 10-18 in Sheffield.  <b>What About Me</b> - A free and confidential service for young people aged 8 - 18 who <u>are affected by</u> someone else's Drug use.	<b>The Corner, 91 Division Street, Sheffield, S1 4GE.</b>  <b>Telephone - 0114 275 2051</b>  <b>Email - <a href="mailto:thecorner.sheffield@cgl.org.uk">thecorner.sheffield@cgl.org.uk</a></b>