

A noxious business

When teenager Sophie smoked a legal brand of synthetic cannabis she expected to get high. But it turned out to be a nasty experience that the sellers and websites promoting the brand refused to acknowledge.

During the college holidays when I was 17, my boyfriend and I took some Bubblegum Kush – a synthetic cannabis which is completely legal. I had tried the same product before and we had experienced no negative effects. It was just like cannabis but stronger and faster acting. However, the most recent time I used it, the effects were very different.

One morning we had nothing to do so we decided to smoke some using a bong. As soon as I took it I knew it didn't feel like the last time. I was sick. I remember having my head over a bag trying to get the stuff out of my system. My heart felt like it was speeding up. My boyfriend felt my heart and told me it was going at about 300bpm. I could feel this beat all around my body and a pulsing in my head. I tried to focus on the TV but it was too difficult. All I could concentrate on was how my body was feeling. I was shaking all over, my hands, legs and even my head was shaking.

I kept being handed water and told to drink but I could barely hold the cup and bring it to my mouth. All my movements were slow and I had to focus so much just to reach out my hand. My head felt heavy and I also felt really hot. The worst thing was having this overwhelming urge to close my eyes and sleep, but being convinced that if I closed them I would die. I remember picturing articles in newspapers with headlines like 'Legal high girl dies'. Apparently I was extremely pale and "looked like death". I kept saying that I would be all right as I didn't want my boyfriend to worry, although I know this was stupid. He remembers that my voice was very quiet and my speech really slow.

He was just about to call the ambulance when I began to feel better.



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I think the whole scenario lasted only about 15 minutes, but it felt like much longer. Although my boyfriend had took the same kush (just a tiny bit less) he did not have a reaction anywhere near like mine, although he said that he didn't like the feeling he got. One of my friends had an even worse time than me, with another legal synthetic cannabis called Evolutions (now banned). They had a terrible experience including hallucinations, sweats and vomiting.

I felt I had a duty to report what had happened to Red Eye, the head shop in Brighton where I had bought it, so that they could remove it from sale or at

least warn people when they buy it. As I began to explain what had happened, the man interrupted saying that I had misused the product and that it was a "novelty collectors item". It is true that on the packaging it says "not for human consumption", but I know this is complete rubbish: people buy them to get high.

I noticed that the online reviews scored Bubblegum Kush very high. After having the bad experience both my boyfriend and I wrote negative, one star reviews for it, stating that it was dangerous. These reviews were sent for moderation but months later they are still not up on the site.

I feel that these products should not be sold. The people working at the shop where I bought it know full well what people do with the products, but they just churn out pre-prepared phrases to cover themselves. They are happy to take people's money and defend themselves as an honest business, but there are not taking any responsibility and have no interest in the safety of their customers. And I'm pretty sure this is not the only one.

Before I took Bubblegum Kush, I very naively assumed that as it was legal, it was safe. But now I realise that it is only legal because it is yet to be made illegal. Ever since I was in year 6 (aged 11), I have heard horror stories by speakers coming into my school about illegal drugs. But I had never been informed about the dangers of legal highs. I think that had I been warned and informed about legal highs, I could have made an educated decision when I took them, and I may well have decided not to.

I know I will never take any legal highs ever again and I have urged all my friends to never touch them.