

35 factsheet

Mephedrone



What is it?

Mephedrone (4-methylmethcathinone) – street names include meph, m-cat, miaow-miaow, drone, 4-MMC or bubbles – is a stimulant producing a similar experience to amphetamines or ecstasy. Mephedrone is a white, off-white or yellowish powder. It is usually snorted but can also be swallowed in bombs (wraps of paper) and may appear in pill or capsule form.

Mephedrone is a cathinone derivative with a chemical structure which is very closely related to amphetamines. It is probably the most well known of a group of drugs derived from cathinone (the same chemical found in khat) although two other compounds are also increasingly recognised on the market. These are methadone and methylone. The effects of methadone are said to be broadly similar to mephedrone, although methylone is said to give the user an experience more closely related to taking ecstasy.

Other less common compounds from the cathinone family that may be used recreationally include flephedrone (4-FMC), bromomethcathinone (4-BMC), ethylone (MDEC), and buphedrone and it is possible that other compounds are in circulation.

Legal status

Mephedrone and related cathinones are now Class B drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The legislation came into effect on 16 April 2010. The legislation is generic and encompasses a wide range of cathinone derivatives.

Generic legislation has been drafted to try and ensure that chemists cannot circumvent the law by producing chemical analogues of proscribed drugs.

Prevalence

It is not known how many people use mephedrone, methadone, methylone or related cathinone derivatives in the UK. As yet, these drugs do not feature in any of the major surveys of drug use such as the British Crime Survey

Drug Misuse Declared bulletin. However, a recent survey of clubbers conducted by *Mixmag* found that mephedrone's popularity had soared in the last year, with 41.7 per cent of those surveyed ever having used it and 33.6 per cent reporting last month use, making it the fourth most popular drug in the last month.

Effects/risks

There is no significant clinical literature on the effects of mephedrone and the other cathinone derivatives currently gaining popularity on the drug scene, so we have to rely on anecdotal reports from users and observed reports from hospital A&E departments.

Many people who have used mephedrone report that their experiences are similar to taking amphetamines, ecstasy or cocaine, with a sense of euphoria and wellbeing. Users become more alert, confident and talkative. Snorting the drug can lead to very sore nasal passages, throats and mouths, with burns or cuts caused by the chemicals sometimes leading to nose bleeds.

Like other stimulants, the cathinone derivatives can have an impact on the heart. Some users report heart palpitations, or an irregular or racing heartbeat, which may last for some time after taking the drugs. Users can experience blurred vision, hot flushes or chills and muscle tension, particularly in the jaw and face, and some people report that their fingers and other extremities have taken on a blueish pallor due to vasoconstriction. Nausea and vomiting has been reported, particularly if mixed with other drugs such as alcohol or cannabis.

A lot of anecdotal reports about mephedrone warn that once users have started using the drug in a particular session, it is very hard to stop, with compulsive redosing ('fending') leading to a number of unpleasant side effects including insomnia, involuntary muscle clenching and hallucinations. In some cases, it seems, regular or heavy use may develop into psychological dependency.

Mephedrone has been implicated in a number of deaths although, contrary to many media reports, a causal role in any fatalities has not yet been conclusively proven.

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