

Effective community response to synthetic drug incidents

Communities can set up a response group to co-ordinate any actions relating to synthetic drug incidents. This group can work with stakeholders and the media to reduce any further harm and get people the support they need.



Prepare in advance

Establish a synthetics response group with 3-5 people from local health, Police, and social services. Meet regularly to review the situation.

Provide 'Did You Know' [Synthetic Psychoactive Substances resources](#) to at-risk communities

Prepare a contact list of key frontline organisations to be kept up to date if there is a serious incident or death (e.g. homelessness services, emergency department, Police, mental health and addiction services, outreach workers).

Obtain permission for this response group to comment publicly on behalf of the member organisations if an incident happens.



Immediate Response

Activate and convene a meeting of the synthetics response group.

Get the substance tested (if possible) by the Institute of Environmental Science & Research (ESR). Most emergency departments have an agreement with ESR and this is funded.

Contact key frontline organisations to prepare for future incidents by engaging at-risk communities and communicating harm reduction information. This could include specific information about the identified substance so people know how to be safer.

Provide media comment about what to look out for (i.e. specific substance information or drug reactions) and what to do in an overdose.



Ongoing response

Reach out to identified at-risk groups with a focus on harm reduction information and tools.

Continue to collate data and feed it into national data sets (Institute of Environmental Science & Research (ESR), Ministry of Health, District Health Board, Poisons Centre etc).

Update the public and media when more is known about the substance and how to keep safe.



Within 2-4 days

Collate data on the number of incidents, suspected substance and its effects, at-risk populations, and associated harms.

Distribute a joint media release with harm reduction advice and where to go for help.

Contact organisations and support services that work with people at risk of harm (e.g. schools, alternative education, social service) and provide prevention resources and harm reduction messages.

THE KEY MESSAGES

Synthetics are unpredictable substances that can be very harmful and should be avoided.

- 1 If using synthetics, start slow. Don't use alone and stop if you feel unwell. Each dose can be different, even if it looks the same.
- 2 If someone has used synthetics and is having difficulty breathing, experiencing extreme paranoia or agitation, losing consciousness, seizing or foaming at the mouth they need urgent medical attention and you should call 111.
- 3 People who experience harm from these substances should be provided with care and support.

Use non-stigmatising language

Use people-centred language to make it easier for people to seek support, such as:

Drug users	People who use drugs
Addicts	People struggling with their drug use
Drug problem	Risky, heavy use, unhealthy drug use