

17th May 2007

Update on seizures of cannabis contaminated with glass particles

1. This is an update to a previous alert, issued on January 16 this year regarding potential health harms associated with the use of cannabis that had been contaminated with glass particles
2. Since then we have been investigating this matter further, in consultation with colleagues in the Forensic Science Service and this communication is to update you on our latest advice based on emerging information.
3. Whilst there is some evidence of a fall in the levels of glass contamination of cannabis in 2007, there is also a possibility that it has become less easy for users to detect it.
4. Information received from the Forensic Science Service in April 2007, which includes analysis of seizures of cannabis, provides the following updated information:
 - a. contaminated cannabis has been in circulation since at least July 2006 and in significant numbers since at least November 2006;
 - b. contaminated cannabis is found in approximately 5-10% of herbal cannabis seizure cases examined;
 - c. the proportions in seized cannabis in February (4.6%) and March (5.9%) are lower than that in January (9.6%), which may indicate that the market is changing in response to the media and concerns of users;
 - d. glass-contaminated cannabis has now been found in most parts of the UK – but not in Wales, and with no recent seizures in Northern Ireland;
 - e. evidence to date supports the view that the contaminated cannabis is being imported, probably from the Netherlands;
 - f. the reason for adding the glass particles remains uncertain, but it still seems likely that they are added to improve the apparent quality and weight;
 - g. internet cannabis forums are now reporting the appearance of cannabis contaminated with much finer particles that are not easily detected as a gritty feeling; and

- h. if growers are using much smaller particles of glass beads, this could, theoretically, increase the health risk of smoking contaminated cannabis.
- 5. Please note that the main alert and information for patients provided in January 2007, advising to stop or reduce use, and to avoid any further use of samples where there is suspicion of actual contamination, still stands. The wording of each has been updated to reflect the information that there are internet reports of samples with finer glass that may not be identifiable by a feeling of grittiness.
- 6. DH will continue to monitor the available information and will provide updated information when appropriate.

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