

What groups or 'classes' of drugs are defined by the law in the UK?

Give any examples you can of drugs that might be found in these classes.

What do these key terms mean?

'Possession'

'Supply'

'Intent to supply?'

What are the potential risks of using illegal drugs on someone's health and wellbeing?

What might the consequences be for buying, selling, or using illegal drugs? List any that you can, including for the people directly involved, or others around them.

	Examples	Risks
Opioids Relieve pain and can create feelings of pleasure.		
Stimulants Speed up and increase activity in the body, e.g. increasing heart rate, alertness and energy. Can create feelings of pleasure.		
Hallucinogens and psychedelics Alter perceptions of reality or cause hallucinations.		
Dissociatives Can create feelings of relaxation, numbness, or disconnection from the body.		
Cannabinoids Can create feelings of relaxation, getting 'the giggles', or sedation.		
Depressants Slow down and suppress activity in the body, lowering cognitive abilities and slowing reactions.		
Empathogens Can create feelings of being 'loved up' or connected to others, by releasing serotonin. Can also cause someone to want to move and dance.		

Examples

1. Benzodiazepines (also known as 'benzos')	2. Cannabis (also known as 'weed' or 'marijuana'), CBD or THC (chemicals which are derived from the cannabis plant)	3. Ketamine (also known as 'K' or 'Special K')
4. Ecstasy (also known as 'MDMA', 'E', or 'Molly')	5. Nitrous oxide (also known as 'balloons' or 'laughing gas')	6. Cocaine (also known as 'coke', 'blow' or 'Charlie')
7. Alcohol (also known as 'booze')	8. Solvents (e.g. substances that might be inhaled, such as aerosols)	9. Nicotine (also known as 'nic')
10. Codeine (a painkiller found in a medicine called 'co-codamol')	11. Psilocybin mushrooms (also known as 'magic mushrooms')	12. Synthetic cannabinoids (also known as 'spice')

Risks

- a) It can be hard to know exactly what the substance is, how powerful the dosage is, or what it contains, as it might have been adulterated. This means it has been mixed (or 'cut') with other materials that can have unpredictable and harmful effects (e.g. feeling ill, losing consciousness, and causing long-term damage to the body, or loss of life).
- b) The substance might be falsely sold as a different product. For example, a synthetic (laboratory-made) drug might be sold as one that is produced from a natural source such as a plant. Or, it may be sold illegally as a 'medicine', without a prescription from a verified healthcare provider. Because it isn't clear what is in a synthetic drug, it might be much more powerful and carry unknown risks.
- c) A person who has used the substance might feel less in control of their behaviour and actions. For example, they might feel more willing to do things that might hurt themselves or others. Their reactions to the environment around them might be slower.
- d) A person who has used the substance might experience thoughts or feelings that are emotionally upsetting and feel more intense than usual, such as increased anxiety or panic.
- e) Frequent or long-term use of the substance might cause damage to the body, lead to a substance use disorder, or cause mental illness. It might become more challenging to stop using the substance over time or users might feel they need to take more of the drug to feel its effects.

	Examples	Risks
Opioids Relieve pain and can create feelings of pleasure.	10	
Stimulants Speed up and increase activity in the body, e.g. increasing heart rate, alertness and energy. Can create feelings of pleasure.	9	
Hallucinogens and psychedelics Alter perceptions of reality or cause hallucinations.		a, c, d, e
Dissociatives Can create feelings of relaxation, numbness, or disconnection from the body.	3, 5	a, c, d, e
Cannabinoids Can create feelings of relaxation, getting 'the giggles', or sedation.		
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	Examples	Risks
<p>Opioids</p> <p>Relieve pain and can create feelings of pleasure.</p>	10) Codeine	<p>a, b, c, d, e</p> <p>Some opioids, such as codeine (and morphine), are used legally for medical purposes, and are strictly controlled. When opioids are sold illegally, they may contain other substances which are unknown to the user, or the person selling the drugs. This can be known as a drug being 'cut' with another substance. They can cause substance use disorders or dependence, which make it hard for a person using them to stop. Use of these substances can lead to severe health complications for the user, including loss of life. If students mention heroin as an example of an opioid, clarify that it is a semi-synthetic opioid, as it is made from morphine that has been chemically processed.</p>
<p>Stimulants</p> <p>Speed up and increase activity in the body, e.g. increasing heart rate, alertness and energy. Can create feelings of pleasure.</p>	<p>6) Cocaine</p> <p>9) Nicotine</p>	<p>a, c, d, e</p> <p>Different stimulants can create a range of effects for users.</p> <p>They can cause substance use disorders or dependence, which make it hard for a person using them to stop, potentially leading to long-term physical and mental health complications. The effects on a person's physical health will also change depending on how a person chooses to take the drug (e.g. by smoking or inhaling the substance).</p>
<p>Hallucinogens and psychedelics</p> <p>Alter perceptions of reality or cause hallucinations.</p>	11) Psilocybin mushrooms	<p>a, c, d, e</p> <p>Hallucinogens and psychedelics can make it hard to tell the difference between reality and the imagination, increasing the danger of harmful behaviour.</p>

	Examples	Risks
<p>Dissociatives</p> <p>Can create feelings of relaxation, numbness, or disconnection from the body.</p>	<p>3) Ketamine</p> <p>5) Nitrous oxide</p>	<p>a, c, d, e</p> <p>Dissociatives are sometimes used in medical settings as an anaesthetic (a drug that temporarily blocks pain) or to control pain. When they are used outside of medical settings, and without strict controls, they can be very dangerous to a user. It is impossible to tell the 'purity' of a dissociative when sold illegally.</p> <p>Drugs such as ketamine can make someone feel disconnected from reality and more likely to act in ways that might cause physical or mental harm. They can also lead to long-term damage in the body, such as damage to the bladder and liver, or difficulties with mental health. Sometimes ketamine is mixed ('cut') with other substances. For some users, it can create hallucinations and lead to mental and physical health difficulties.</p> <p>Drugs such as nitrous oxide carry similar risks to using aerosols, such as the possibility of suffocation or losing consciousness, or long-term health complications such as nerve damage. Exposing others to the gases released when consuming the substance can also lead to risks, such as losing concentration while driving.</p>
<p>Cannabinoids</p> <p>Can create feelings of relaxation, getting 'the giggles', or sedation.</p>	<p>2) Cannabis</p> <p>12) Synthetic cannabinoids</p>	<p>a, b, c, d, e</p> <p>Cannabis products carry risks to mental and physical health, including creating feelings of irritability, anxiety, feeling 'low', or producing hallucinations. As cannabis slows the brain's reaction time, it can increase the risk of someone harming themselves or others. This is also why it is illegal to drive while under the influence of cannabis. Long-term use can increase the likelihood of developing mental health difficulties, and if smoked, can also increase the risk of lung cancer.</p> <p>Some products may be sold with the label 'CBD', which is a naturally occurring chemical within cannabis. This doesn't have psychoactive effects and doesn't get the user 'high'. It can be bought legally in some shops. However, when bought illegally it might contain traces of THC, the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis which causes the feeling of a 'high'.</p> <p>Cannabis or THC vapes often contain harmful synthetic cannabinoids. Synthetic cannabinoids, sometimes known as 'spice', can also be sold under the label of various 'herbal' mixes. It is impossible for a user to tell what they are purchasing, and they might unintentionally take a very powerful dose with increased risks to mental and physical health.</p>

	Examples	Risks
<p>Depressants</p> <p>Slow down and suppress activity in the body, lowering cognitive abilities and slowing reactions.</p>	<p>1) Benzodiazepines</p> <p>7) Alcohol</p> <p>8) Solvents</p>	<p>a, c, e</p> <p>Depressants slow down the body's nervous system, which can make it hard for someone who has taken a substance to respond to the environment around them, or to feel in control of their actions. Frequent or long-term use can cause long-term harm to physical and mental wellbeing.</p> <p>Benzodiazepines are used for medical purposes under strict controls. However, when they are sold illegally (known as 'street benzos'), it is impossible to know what other substances the drug may have been 'cut' with, or how powerful they are. This can lead to severe health complications.</p> <p>Solvents are very difficult to take in controlled doses, and can lead to physical complications such as suffocation, losing consciousness, or loss of life.</p>
<p>Empathogens</p> <p>Can create feelings of being 'loved up' or connected to others, by releasing serotonin. Can also cause someone to want to move and dance.</p>	<p>4) Ecstasy</p>	<p>a, c, d, e</p> <p>Drugs such as ecstasy may be 'cut', or mixed, with other substances with unpredictable effects. Long-term use can cause physical effects such as damage to organs in the body, while short-term use can cause a severe reaction which might place a person's life in danger. This may be because of the drug itself, the user consuming a higher dosage of the drug than they are aware of, or other unknown substances the drug may have been 'cut' with.</p>

Scenario A

Joanna is 19 years old. On a night out with friends, someone that she has seen around town offers to sell her some drugs. She knows there are often local police officers around in the evenings, but doesn't think they'd suspect she has anything on her.

Scenario B

Ivan is 17 years old and in his first year of college. He has a part time job, but tells his friends that he's looking for a few more hours to help boost his income. Someone his friend knows messages him saying he can get Ivan some work helping to sell some product. He doesn't say more in the message, but tells Ivan to speak to his friend if he is interested.

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18+

	Maximum Penalty – Possession	Maximum Penalty – Intent to supply/Supply/Production
Class A	Up to seven years* in prison, an unlimited fine, or both.	Up to a life sentence, an unlimited fine, or both.
Class B**	Up to five years* in prison, an unlimited fine, or both.	Up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine, or both.
Class C	Up to two years* in prison, an unlimited fine, or both (not including anabolic steroids, which are legal to possess for personal use when prescribed by a pharmacist).	Up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine, or both.
Temporary class drugs (temporarily banned while the government decides their class)	Police can confiscate if they suspect a temporary class drug.	Up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine, or both.
Psychoactive substances (substances that can alter a person’s mental state, e.g. making them hallucinate, or changing their perception of time and space)	None.	Up to seven years in prison, an unlimited fine, or both.

*The sentence given for possessing drugs will depend on the context. It can be affected by factors including: the quantity of the drug the person has, where the person was found with the drugs, the person’s history (for example, if they have a criminal record).

**If a person is found possessing cannabis for personal use and no past record of possession, the penalty may be less severe. If it is not a first offence, they might face the maximum penalty.

A person convicted for possession, production or supply of illegal drugs will have a criminal record. This can have long-term impacts, such as negatively affecting future employment or insurance policies, travelling to other countries, or increasing the severity of any future convictions.

Under 18s

- If a person under the age of 18 is found in possession of illegal drugs, the police may share this information with their parents or carers.
- A young person found in possession of drugs may face a police caution, a referral order (where a young person is referred to their local Youth Offending Team and must have regular meetings and meet various conditions for three to 12 months), a youth rehabilitation order, or a custodial sentence. This decision will depend on the young person's history, or the context of the situation where they are found.
- For a more serious drug-related offence, a young person aged between 12 and 17 could be placed in youth custody (such as a secure children's home, secure training centre or a young offender's institution). A child aged between 10 and 11 can be placed in a secure children's home for a serious offence if this is considered appropriate for their and/or others' safety.
- A young person convicted of an offence before they turn 18 will have a criminal record. They may have to tell future employers or educators about this depending on the time since the conviction, the type of conviction (e.g. a fine or time in custody), or the type of employment (e.g. working with children or vulnerable adults).
- If a young person is arrested before turning 18, but turns 18 while waiting for sentencing, they may receive an adult sentence. This can depend on factors such as how old they were when they committed the offence and how mature they are considered to be.

Local impact	National impact	International impact

- a) Relationships between families and friendships might be strained because of difficulties relating to drug use.
- b) Vulnerable people might be at risk of harm because of involvement in the drug trade (e.g. young people facing child criminal exploitation)
- c) People may become trapped in drug trafficking, where they face exploitation and harm, as a result of being promised money or transport to another region or country.
- d) Hospital costs increase to help treat people who have been negatively affected by drugs.
- e) Communities might face higher levels of violent crime or instability related to drug production and trafficking.