

# Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System (DAMIS)

## Activity report

October 2016 – September 2017

### Background

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to find out about emerging trends in drug and alcohol misuse, so we can act quickly and provide relevant information or advice to those who misuse drugs or alcohol. Much of the information sent out through DAMIS is practical advice aimed at reducing the harms to people from their drug use. It is aimed at adults, and those working with young people should exercise their professional judgement to ensure that any information passed on to people under 18 is appropriate.

The kind of information DAMIS collects includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs becoming available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects

The Department of Health oversees DAMIS with support from lead partners: the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Forensic Service Northern Ireland (FSNI). Representatives of these agencies form the DAMIS Steering Group.

DAMIS is essentially an e-mail network of individuals who work for specialist drug and alcohol services, or for services that work with or treat people who misuse drugs or alcohol (for example homeless services, or Emergency Departments (ED's)). These people have access to information on emerging drugs and their impacts on people who use them, and are ideally placed to pass on timely information to DAMIS. Their roles also give them the opportunity to provide timely harm reduction information to their clients.

As at September 2017, there were 455 individuals on the DAMIS network.

Those on the DAMIS Network email information they have on substances of concern to a central email address. The information contained in these emails is shared with the DAMIS Steering Group for consideration. However, DAMIS is a confidential system and the identity of anyone who sends in emails is seen only by the PHA coordinators. The Steering Group agree any necessary actions

Possible actions include:

- Monitoring the situation

- Seeking more information from the original informant, or from other experts in the field (addictions staff, homeless staff and drug users)
- Sending specialist information to specific groups, for example GP Practices, or Needle Exchange Providers.
- Circulating information to the DAMIS Network
- Issuing a Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Alert
- Issuing a press release

When deciding what action to take, the Steering Group consider the clarity and reliability of the information received, the value in sharing the information, and the target group(s) for the information.

The following tables summarise key information received by DAMIS, and circulated by DAMIS, in the 12 months from October 2016 – September 2017.

## Information received by DAMIS during October 2016 – September 2016

| <b>Emails received by DAMIS October 2016 – September 2016</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Topic</b>   |
| 26/10/2016  | Superman logo 'ecstasy' tablets containing PMA / PMMA may be circulating in Republic of Ireland.   |
| 03/11/2016  | Western Trust area reporting superman logo 'ecstasy' tablets in circulation with users presenting flu-like symptoms.   |
| 18/11/2016  | Several patients presenting to Royal Victoria Hospital ED with suspected heroin overdose.  |
| 22/11/2016  | Sky High – suspected deaths in Mid Ulster area.  |
| 22/11/2016  | Increased use of 'Xanax bars' in Derry area.   |
| 05/01/2017  | Drug alert – "champagne" ecstasy pills believed to contain high levels of MDMA being bought from dark web and used in Belfast Trust area. 'Minions' pills believed to be ecstasy also circulating in Belfast area. |
| 09/01/2017  | PMA and PMMA detected in patients admitted to ED with suspected ecstasy overdose.  |
| 09/01/2017  | Unknown vapour substance, inhaled by users, causing giddiness / aggression in people in Northern Trust area.   |
| 09/01/2017  | Minion substance which is smoked reported to be very strong and has led to collapse in user.   |
| 02/02/2017  | Suspected misuse of Xanax and lycrica linked to hospitalisations in Western Trust area.  |
| 03/02/2017  | (Response to request for information) Darth Vader drugs circulating in Mid Ulster  |

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|            | area (no unexpected side effects reported).   |
| 02/03/2017 | A number of patients hospitalised with suspected overdose after taking “Internet blues” (believed to be diazepam) in Western Trust area.  |
| 02/03/2017 | Xanax powder purchased off internet being made locally in Northern Trust area, stamped with Xanax logo then sold as 10mg tablets leading to suspected overdoses.  |
| 07/03/2017 | U47,700 (synthetic opioid) linked to 2 deaths in Northern Ireland.  |
| 03/04/2017 | A number of sudden deaths in custody in Belfast may have involved heroin, synthetic opioids or other substances.  |
| 05/04/2017 | South eastern Trust area pharmacy clients reporting prescribed pregabalin misuse.   |
| 27/04/2017 | Fentanyl and carfentanyl being added to heroin in England. No fentanyl or carfentanyl found to date in Northern Ireland heroin seizures.  |
| 28/04/2017 | Tablets looking like bars, in small plastic bags with cannabis leaf logos, found in east Belfast (later reported to be alprazolam).   |
| 04/05/2017 | PSNI report the potential presence of fentanyl/carfentanyl in heroin in Northern Ireland.   |
| 04/05/2017 | Person is south eastern area experiencing very poor mental health and behaving erratically after taking a number of substances, including Transformer pills (believed to be ecstasy) and “street benzos”. |
| 05/05/2017 | PSNI report the potential presence of furanylfentanyl in heroin in Northern Ireland.  |
| 05/05/2017 | Yellow Transformer pills in Belfast Trust area believed to contain high levels of MDMA.   |

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| 12/05/2017 | Confirmation from WEDINOS (Welsh drug testing system) that sample blue transformer pills sent to them from Northern Ireland were tested and contained MDMA.   |
| 19/05/2017 | Reports of "snow blow" a New psychoactive substance (NPS) use in Republic of Ireland. linked to at-risk behaviours in homeless people and increase in HIV transmission.                             |
| 19/06/2017 | Reports in Belfast area of widespread use of synthetic hallucinogenics in young people with adverse mental health side effects.   |
| 26/05/2017 | (PSNI Response to query re: "snow blow" use) - no intelligence this is currently circulating in Northern Ireland.   |
| 26/06/2017 | "Dutch Green Defqons" circulating in Omagh area.  |
| 29/06/2017 | Unusual symptoms, including psychosis, identified in an individual who attended Belsonic. Not known is linked to substance use.   |
| 10/07/2017 | Suspected deaths from street benzos and 'sniffing' of lyricea in Belfast area   |
| 23/08/2017 | Query re. any info on Tripster an 'LSD' type tablet.  |
| 25/08/2017 | Northern Trust area needle exchange report people attending pharmacy in a highly intoxicated state (unsure what substances taken).  |
| 14/09/2017 | 25mg pink tablet believed to be diazepam circulating in Northern Trust area.  |
| 16/09/2017 | Increasing reports on suspected heroin overdoses in Belfast.  |
| 22/09/2017 | (Response to request for information) Belfast service report clients saying that the heroin on the market is still very strong; service also reported an increase in suspected non-fatal overdoses. |
| 22/09/2017 | (Response to request for information) Southern Trust area service reports client misusing fentanyl bought locally.  |

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| 22/09/17 | Counterfeit Xanax causing alarming withdrawal symptoms including suicidal thoughts, in experienced benzo users. |
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## Alerts issued by DAMIS during October 2016 – September 2017

| Email alerts circulated by DAMIS to the DAMIS Network |   |
|---|---|
| October 2016 – September 2017                         |   |
| Date  | Topic   |
| 28/10/2016  | Superman logo tablets circulating in RoI which may contain PMMA.  |
| 18/11/2016  | Number of suspected overdoses in homeless hostels in Belfast area, believed to be from polydrug misuse (primarily heroin, pregabalin and diazepam). |
| 25/11/2016  | Number of suspected in homeless hostel in Northern area. Overdose harm reduction advice and Take Home Naloxone contact details given.               |
| 15/12/2016  | Some recent overdoses linked to drugs bingeing. Harm Reduction Advice given.  |
| 22/12/2016  | U47,700 and Etizolam information and advice from Drugwatch.   |
| 09/01/2017  | Ecstasy (MDMA) harm reduction advice.   |
| 09/01/2017  | Request for information on unknown vapour reported in Northern Trust area.  |
| 10/01/2017  | Reports of hospitalisation from suspected PMA / PMMA in ecstasy tablets.  |
| 30/01/2017  | Newspaper article circulated: Darth Vader tablets reported as linked to a case of kidney failure.   |
| 03/03/2017  | Request for information following reports of hospitalisation of young people in the Western area after taking "Internet blues" -                    |

|            |   |
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|            | (believed to be diazepam).  |
| 07/03/2017 | Request for information regarding synthetic opioid U47, 700 linked to hospitalisation and deaths in Northern Ireland.   |
| 06/04/2017 | Polydrug use alert and advice.  |
| 27/04/2017 | Alert re heroin contaminated with fentanyl in England, with letter from Public Health England.  |
| 05/05/2017 | Alert re possible presence of heroin contaminated with fentanyl in Northern Ireland.  |
| 08/05/2017 | CMO Alert re: fentanyl contaminated heroin.   |
| 20/06/2017 | Alert re: synthetic hallucinogens (acid).   |
| 29/06/2017 | Request for information: Unusual symptoms, including psychosis, identified in an individual who attended Belsonic. Not known if linked to substance use. Request for information on anyone else with similar symptoms after attending Belsonic. |
| 07/07/2017 | Overdose harm reduction advice.   |
| 10/07/2017 | Alert re: people having seizures after taking street benzos and possibly also pregabalin (Lyrica or "Buds").  |
| 18/07/2017 | PSNI Press release information on diazepam.   |
| 22/09/2017 | Fentanyl update.  |
| 22/09/2017 | Xanax (alprazolam) linked to suspected overdoses in Belfast.  |

*People who wish to be added to the DAMIS Network can email a request to [damis@hscni.net](mailto:damis@hscni.net). They will then be sent a form to complete, indicating their role in provision of drug and alcohol, and/or other related, services. The request will then be considered by the Steering Group.*

