

# Policing drugs

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The following documents provide advice and guidance on policing drugs.

## Medicinal cannabis

Medicinal cannabis is a broad term for any sort of cannabis-based medicine used to relieve symptoms.

Home Office guidance defines medicinal cannabis (or more correctly, cannabis-based products for medicinal use (CBPMs)), as:

- a product that is, or contains cannabis, cannabis resin, cannabidiol (CBD) or a cannabidiol derivative.
- produced for medicinal use in humans, and
- is regulated as a medicinal product or an ingredient of a medical product.

**(Home Office, 2024)**

Cannabis can have different pharmaceutical forms, strengths or efficacy and can be made up of many components. The two main components are CBD and Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). CBD is the non-psychoactive component whereas THC is the part that can create euphoria in humans. CBPMs can be both licensed and unlicensed

The following guidance has been prepared specifically for police officers and police staff who may encounter those who have been prescribed medicinal cannabis. It covers the following key points:

- Legislation, and the Misuse of Drugs (Amendments) Regulations 2018.
- NHS definition of cannabis based products for medicinal use.
- Licensed and unlicensed cannabis based products for medicinal use.

- Advice for police officers or staff encountering individuals stating they are legally in possession of medical cannabis, including presentation of a CanCard, or driving whilst on prescribed medication.
- Useful links and contacts.

For further information, go to [NPCC, APCDLO \(2025\) Medicinal Cannabis and the Police – Guidance for Officers and Staff.](#)

## Nitrous oxide

Possession of nitrous oxide – also known as laughing gas – becomes illegal from 8 November 2023 as a controlled Class C drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Possession where a person intends to wrongfully inhale it (for example, to 'get high') will be an offence.

Consequences could include:

- unlimited fine
- visible community punishment
- caution – which would appear on their criminal record
- prison sentence for repeat serious offenders of up to two years
- maximum prison sentence of 14 years for dealers

For further information see:

- [Nitrous oxide possession illegal from November 2023 \(GOV.UK\)](#)
- [Nitrous oxide ban: guidance \(Home Office, 2023\)](#)
- [Circular 006/2023: Control of nitrous oxide under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 \(Home Office, 2023\)](#)

## Psychoactive Substances Act 2016

The Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 (the Act), came into force 26 May 2016.

A psychoactive substance is any substance capable of producing a psychoactive effect in the person who consumes it, and it is not an exempted substance (s 2(1)(a) and (b) of the Act).

'Psychoactive substance' is an umbrella term for products that are intended to mimic the effects of

controlled drugs.

For further information see [Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 briefing note](#).

For further resources see also the Knowledge Hub [Drugs community](#) (this link is available to authorised users who are logged on to the [Knowledge Hub](#)).

## Guidelines on khat possession

Khat became a controlled Class C drug on 24 June 2014. The Government decided to ban khat under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to address community concerns on the health and social harms of khat use in the UK and the risk of the UK becoming a single, regional khat smuggling hub for onward trafficking to countries where it is banned.

For further information see [National Policing Guidelines on KHAT Possession for Personal Use Intervention Framework \(England & Wales Only\)](#).

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