

KNOW IT Heroin is a painkilling drug made from morphine which is derived from the opium poppy.

On the street heroin is known as smack, brown, gear, junk, skag.

It comes as a white powder when pure. Street heroin is usually brownish-white.

It is smoked, injected, or snorted through a straw.

THE LAW Heroin is illegal. It is a Class A drug.

The maximum penalty for possession is 7 years' prison and/or a fine.

The maximum penalty for supply is life imprisonment and/or a fine.

A drugs record can cause serious problems at home and school and could affect job prospects.

If you have a drugs record, it can be difficult to get a visa to travel to some countries.

The information given here is general. If specific legal advice is required, please consult a solicitor.

EFFECTS In small doses heroin gives a sense of warmth, well-being and relaxation.

At higher doses can make users feel drowsy.

Excessive amounts can result in overdose, coma and in some cases death.

While under the influence of heroin the user's pupils become constricted ('pin point pupils').

Common effects include constipation, nausea and vomiting.

RISKS

Heroin is very addictive. Users who form a habit can end up taking the drug just to feel normal. Addicted users need a constant supply of heroin. Getting the money to buy the drug can dominate their lives. Some users resort to crime to pay for their habit.

Withdrawing from heroin can be very hard. Some people manage to kick the habit, but mentally it may take years to be free of it. A user is likely to need professional help to withdraw from heroin.

When heroin is smoked, the effects are felt in seconds, but wear off quickly. Smoking repeatedly can lead to increased tolerance and addiction.

When heroin is injected there is an increased risk of physical damage and death from overdose.

Sharing injecting equipment puts users at risk of dangerous infections like HIV and hepatitis.

Often heroin available on the street is contaminated with other substances. Injecting contaminated heroin can cause abscesses and other infections.

Users who start by smoking or snorting heroin sometimes switch to injection to maximise the high.

Users can get addicted to heroin whether they smoke, snort or inject it.

Risks are increased if heroin is mixed with other drugs, particularly alcohol. The combination of heroin and alcohol can kill.

There is no guarantee how strong a particular batch of heroin is, so a user may not know what dose they are taking. Users risk accidental overdose.

If someone takes heroin regularly, the body gets used to the drug (this is known as 'tolerance'). When 'tolerance' builds up, the user needs to take more heroin to get a similar effect.