



August 2024

Dear

Tackling Vapes and illegal substances in schools

Devon and Cornwall Police are concerned about the growing prevalence of the synthetic cannabinoid known as Spice in vapes and its use by young people. Often young people will be unwittingly using Spice thinking that their vape contains THC from cannabis. Spice is laboratory made and is much cheaper than THC. It is also much stronger and can cause a range of medical issues.

In addition to the threats from illegal substances in vapes, we are aware of the wider issue of young people being supplied illegal single use nicotine vapes. These illegal vapes can often contain considerably more nicotine than genuine vapes and have long-term health implications.

Devon and Cornwall Police are keen to work with our partners for a multi-agency approach to vapes and recently we have been working with Professor Pudney of the University of Bath. The University has developed a portable testing device for detecting Spice in vapes and we are currently field testing a prototype device. This is an exciting opportunity for us. For the first time we can efficiently and effectively test vapes without having to submit them for expensive laboratory testing.

Due to issues with confiscating and testing vapes, we have minimal data about the prevalence of Spice in vapes. Police are restricted to only being able to test the vapes we seize when we suspect they may contain an illegal substance. Police powers in respect of young people and vapes are limited. Although it is illegal for young people to buy vapes, it is not illegal for them to have them.

We would like to work with schools because schools will often have policies for confiscating vapes on school premises. We are proposing that schools hold a week of action to target vape use and confiscate as many vapes as possible. The vapes can then be tested by Police and the results fed quickly back to the school. This is not about criminalising young people caught with a vape and we would not need to know who the vape was confiscated from.

The intention of the week of action is to build a baseline of data about the prevalence of the vape problem so that a multi-agency response can be developed. We would not need names of young people, all we would ask for is basic information such as year group, male/female, how the young person got the vape (if they were willing to say).

CI Sarah Johns
27 August 2024



From a Police perspective we would be looking for a number of selected schools to hold the week of action w/c 7th October (or another agreed date if this is not suitable) to prove the concept of this approach. If this week is successful, we would then propose to do another week of action w/c 3rd February 2025 involving all secondary schools across Devon and Cornwall.

The data from the testing will be shared with the school and, with agreement, with partner agencies, especially Public Health, so that a multi-agency response can be formulated. This could include future weeks of action and testing as deemed appropriate. The Police, of course, will also look to work with partners such as Trading Standards and other Police forces to disrupt the supply of illegal vapes, and also Safeguarding Leads as we know that vapes have been linked to child safeguarding concerns in the past.

As previously stated, our partnership with the University of Bath is exciting and we are looking to maximise the opportunity that the portable testing device gives us to safeguard young people. A Google search on Professor Pudney will bring up a recent ITV news interview that he did. In this interview he warns of the dangers of vapes with Spice and the consequences it may have for young people. At this stage we are looking to prove the concept of the week of action in October so that we can offer wider testing to all secondary schools in February 2025.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Johns

Chief Inspector - Prevention