

Buying 'legal highs' from the Internet is a risky business

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Many drugs sold as 'legal highs' on the internet do not contain the ingredients they claim. Some instead contain controlled substances and are illegal to sell over the internet. These are findings of Dr. Mark Baron, who bought a range of tablets from different websites to see what each contained. The study is published today in the journal *Drug Testing and Analysis*.

"It is clear that consumers are buying [products](#) that they think contain specific substances, but that in reality the labels are unreliable indicators of the actual contents," says Dr. Baron, who works in the School of Natural and Applied Sciences at the University of Lincoln, UK.

Baron says that buyers need to be aware that they have no idea what they will be taking and that some of the products could contain illegal substances. "The product name cannot be used as an indication of what it contains as there is variation in the content of the same product name between different internet sites," says Baron.

Recently there has been an [explosion](#) in the number of substances deemed 'legal highs' that can be found readily available on the internet. The UK and other governments have acted to control these products however, manufacturers and suppliers seem to be one step ahead as they attempt to offer new products outside of the restrictions of the current legislation.

Baron set out to determine the drug content of such products. Purchasing them was easy; numerous online legal-high retailers market a broad variety of products advertised as research chemicals, [bath salts](#), or [plant food](#) although clearly marketed toward the recreational drug user. "No guidelines exist as to what is sold and in what purity and consumers are led to believe that purchased goods are entirely legal," says Baron.

With just a few clicks Baron bought MDAI, 5-IAI,

Benzo Fury and NRG-3 from www.benzofury.me.uk and two MDA-labelled samples from www.VIPlegals.com and www.wide-mouth-frog.com. Six out of seven products did not contain the advertised active ingredient more disturbingly five samples contained the controlled substances benzylpiperazine and 1-[3-(trifluoromethyl)phenyl]piperazine combined with caffeine.

"These findings show that the legal high market is providing a route to supply banned substances," says Baron. He hopes that this work will help consumers become more aware of the dangers of purchasing products from the internet.

At the same time, legislators need to think fast. "As legislation deals with the current crop of products we can expect to see new products appearing that try to find a route of supplying previously banned substances," says Baron.

More information: "An Analysis of Legal Highs - Do They Contain What it Says On the Tin?" Mark Baron. *Drug Testing and Analysis*; 2011, DOI: [10.1002/dta.274](https://doi.org/10.1002/dta.274)

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