DSM Foundation and University of Bath launch training to combat growing concerns Over Spice-containing vapes in schools

Friday 23 May, 2025

Press release from the DSM Foundation – embargoed to 9am on 23.05.25

In response to findings that one in six
confiscated vapes from UK schools contained the illegal and dangerous drug Spice, drugs education charity the DSM Foundation
has collaborated with the University of Bath
which undertook the original research to produce an innovative training resource aimed at helping school and college staff identify and address the issue.

This is of particular relevance with the UK's disposable vape ban
coming into effect on June 1, when it is anticipated that use of reusable devices among young people – who have been the highest users of single use vapes – will increase. Spice, a potent and highly addictive synthetic cannabinoid, poses significant risks—particularly to school children, whose developing bodies and lack of prior exposure make them more vulnerable to its dangerous effects – and is only present in refillable vapes, not single-use devices.

To counter this emerging risk, the newly launched training package provides essential information in a concise, accessible format. In just 15 minutes, school staff can learn how to identify vapes containing THC/cannabis
or Spice, understand the legal implications for a student who is in possession of such a device (and for the school if it is confiscated), and recognize the signs of use. The training film—deliberately designed for integration into training sessions or staff meetings—ensures educators are equipped with practical knowledge to safeguard students.

Additionally, a printable identification poster, formatted for convenient display on staff room walls, will serve as a quick reference guide. While useful on its own, it is most effective when combined with the training video, reinforcing key insights and supporting proactive measures against the dangers of exposure to Spice and THC/cannabis.

The University of Bath's Professor Christopher Pudney who led on the original research into vapes confiscated by schools, said: "Spice is an extremely potent and addictive drug, typically found in the prison system. Our analysis of vapes confiscated by schools shows that young people are being sold 'cannabis' vapes, but in fact are getting spice, and we are concerned that this may become more widespread if young people swap disposable vapes – which they won't be able to obtain – for refillables. Spice use presents an extremely high risk of immediate and long-term health harm. This resource will enable staff who work with young people to identify e-cigarettes of concern, understand the risks and where to seek support and more information."

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE, founder and director of the DSM Foundation added: "Spice isn't something we've need to talk about in schools since the law changed in 2016 taking so-called 'legal highs' off the high streets, when their use by young people largely fell away, but the need to integrate this into our core delivery to young people, parents, caregivers and professionals has grown rapidly in the last couple of years. Chris's work has reinforced the importance of this, and the ban on disposables has heightened the urgency to put measures in place to support schools, despite the ban being a positive move in general terms for young people. This joint initiative reflects our commitment to protecting young people from the risks associated with illicit substances by ensuring that educators are empowered to respond effectively. To this end, the materials can be downloaded free of charge from https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/product-category/dsmf_pshe_resources/ "

Information for editors:

The DSM Foundation is a drug education charity established in 2014 following the death of 16 year old Daniel Spargo-Mabbs from an accidental overdose of ecstasy. His family felt that he simply hadn't known enough to be able to make decisions that would keep him safe, and realized there was a huge gap in the resources and support available to schools, so set up the charity in order to spare other

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families going through what they had experienced.

The aim of the DSM Foundation is to provide young people with relevant, age-appropriate, up to date and evidence-based information about drugs so they develop the skills to make choices that will keep themselves and their friends as safe as possible. To this end, the charity is currently working in almost 750 schools, colleges and community organisations with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff – the two groups shown by NHS survey data as the most likely sources of information about drugs and alcohol sought out by 11-15 year olds. Educational settings are also able to access “I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won’t Die”, a verbatim play by Mark Wheeller that was commissioned by the charity to tell Dan’s story in the words of his family and friends, through studying the work itself (sometimes due to it being a GCSE Drama set text on the Eduqas syllabus), or booking a Theatre in Education performance. Schools and colleges can also download age-appropriate, relevant, up to date and evidence-based drugs education lesson resources free of charge from the DSM Foundation website for delivery by teachers through PSHE/PSE provision.

For more information about the DSM Foundation, go to https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/.

Media enquiries about this press release or the work of the DSM Foundation should be sent to media@dsmfoundation.org.uk.

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