



# What parents & carers need to know about CHILDREN ACCESSING DRUGS ONLINE

## Why?

The expansion of the online world, including the rise of the dark web and social media, has made it increasingly easier to sell and buy drugs with limited risk of getting caught. With many children and young people now browsing the internet via their own tablets and mobile phones, the digital world has allowed drugs to become more accessible to a younger audience. There are four main reasons why a young person may choose to access drugs online.

### Anonymity

The 'dark web' has become an infamous place where illegal drugs are regularly traded. The 'dark web' is a part of the internet which cannot be indexed by search engines, allowing users to communicate through encrypted messages, and to buy and sell anything with anonymity. The secrecy provided for customers using the dark web removes the need for any direct interaction with dealers, making it an appealing option for children to purchase drugs without anybody finding out. Packages ordered online will be delivered by the postman in discreet packaging and will arouse little suspicion from parents.

### Accessibility

Many young people are purchasing drugs online because of how easy it is to access them. Any prescription drug is available over the internet without the need for a prescription or proof of age. Many websites that are based overseas, such as India and China, deliver to the UK, opening up the door to many more prescription drugs being available.

### Availability

Websites which sell these substances can often resemble common online marketplaces (such as eBay) and feature customer reviews, giving young people the ability to choose their drugs based on the thoughts and feedback of other people who have tried it. There are even YouTube channels dedicated to their hosts reviewing the drugs they have purchased on camera.

### Appealing designs

There are many online drug sellers that use popular culture in their drug designs to encourage a young audience to purchase their products, replicating well-known brands/icons such as Fortnite, Snapchat, Rick & Morty, and Instagram amongst many others.

## What are the dangers?

### It's against the law

Online or offline, it is illegal to possess, supply, import or export and unlawfully produce Class A, B, and C drugs. It is also an offence to produce, supply, possess, import or export psychoactive substances. A psychoactive drug is any form of substance intended for human consumption that is capable of producing a psychoactive effect. Although this excludes substances such as alcohol, tobacco and nicotine, it is still illegal for anyone under the age of eighteen to purchase these substances.

### You don't know what you're buying

Buying drugs online from unregistered sources, such as purchasing through the dark web, can be extremely dangerous with fatal consequences. The strength of drugs can vary massively from batch to batch, and they are not subject to any form of testing or quality control. Additionally, drugs are very rarely exactly what they are advertised as being and are frequently cut with other substances to bulk them out and increase the profit margins of the dealers throughout the supply chain – it is no different within the online marketplace.

### Personal and financial risk

Due to the anonymity that the dark web offers, it has become a venue for criminal activity - including selling and purchasing illegal drugs. Buying drugs from the dark web is a risk as your personal and financial details could be exploited by criminals. However, this also counts for the 'open' web too. Not all drugs are illegal and can easily be found and purchased, however, this still puts your personal and financial details at risk.

## Did you know?

- ▶ The UK is one of the biggest global purchasers of drugs on the dark web.
- ▶ Around 800 cases of posted drugs via RoyalMail were reported in 2018.
- ▶ Two of the biggest dark net marketplaces – Silk Road and AlphaBay – have been shut down by international law enforcement but new sellers will always appear.
- ▶ In 2018, students from the University of Manchester were jailed for up to 15 years for selling £800,000 worth of drugs on the dark web.

## What parents can do

### Conversation & monitoring

It's crucial that you have honest and frequent conversations with your child about their activities (online and offline) and general wellbeing. We believe it's important to have age-appropriate conversations about the consequences of taking drugs, including the possibility of jail time and the dangers of overdosing. As a parent or carer it's important to be one step ahead. Make sure you know enough about the topic to talk to your child in an informed way. Websites such as [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com) can help. In addition to this, advise your child to ignore emails advertising cheap medication and explain how medication should only be bought from registered online pharmacies with verification logos if necessary. It's important to monitor their online activity to spot if they are purchasing or selling drugs online. Keep track of their online conversations as well as their internet searches - look out for keywords such as "buying drugs" if you are suspicious of drug use. Lastly, look out for changes in behaviour that could point to drug use.

### Discuss the law with your child

Ensure that your child knows the laws surrounding buying and selling drugs. You can get a fine or prison sentence if you take, carry, make or sell drugs or psychoactive substances. It is illegal for anyone under the age of eighteen to possess an illegal substance and they can be charged if caught with drugs, whether it's theirs or not. Ordering a controlled drug, such as morphine or methadone, over the internet risks prosecution. Importation of drugs, which refers to receiving drugs from a foreign website, can be treated as a possession or supply offence, although you can still potentially be charged for a supply offence if purchasing online from within the UK. It is also considered a supplying offence to share or sell amongst a small group of friends.

This guide was created in association with Leicestershire Police.



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**National Online Safety**

#### SOURCES

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