

New drug blighting cities 'could get out of control'

Police warn the rise of Spice is straining public resources with officers and NHS staff attacked by users

By Kate McCann
SENIOR POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

A DRUG problem caused by a former legal high that is blighting parts of the UK cannot be allowed to get worse, a senior police officer has said, as he

warned that the rise of “zombies” using the substance called Spice was putting too much pressure on public services.

Chief Supt Wasim Chaudhry also called on the public to stop handing money to homeless people to prevent them from spending it on the drug, which has killed hundreds of users.

The City of Manchester officer said Spice was “a problem we cannot afford to get any worse” after a weekend of serious incidents in which officers and NHS staff were assaulted by users.

He said: “Those who take Spice are

often left incapacitated or seriously ill and need the help of our partners in the NHS and ambulance service. They can also become aggressive and become a danger to themselves and others.

“The truth is, tackling the issues caused by Spice is putting pressure on public services and is taking up a lot of our resources.” Speaking to *The Daily Telegraph*, he added that, while a shortage of officers was not his main concern, “we can’t deny we have a reduced workforce – we’ve gone from 8,000 to 6,200 officers”. He called for a nation-

wide awareness campaign of the dangers the drug poses. A former “legal high” Spice was reclassified as a class B drug last December.

Although users believe it is similar to cannabis, in reality Spice can be up to 900 times more potent and far more addictive. Because the drug is synthetic, no two batches are the same, making it incredibly unpredictable. Users are as young as 15, experts in Manchester said, highlighting the need for an awareness campaign in schools.

Mr Chaudhry added: “People are

giving money to homeless people and they think they’re helping them but they are openly telling me they are using that money to purchase drugs.”

Cllr Nigel Murphy, lead member on crime in Manchester, added: “This is by no means an issue which only Manchester is experiencing although we recognise it is particularly marked in part of the city centre. The Government also has a role to play in addressing this problem by ensuring that our police force and other services have adequate resources to deal with it.”

Sarah Newton, minister for vulnerability, safeguarding and countering extremism, said the Government had recently passed the “Psychoactive Substances Act to outlaw so-called ‘legal highs’ and introduced even tougher controls for synthetic cannabinoids, such as those found in Spice”.

She added that the Government’s new drug strategy would “build on the work already undertaken to prevent drug use in our communities and help dependent individuals to rebuild their lives”.