

EARLY WARNING NOTIFICATION

Tablets with dangerously high levels of MDMA

What is happening?

The Belgian Early Warning System has recently issued an alert to highlight the appearance of tablets with dangerously high levels of MDMA. This supports a trend of the increasing availability of high-risk MDMA tablets observed since last year. Tablets with potentially toxic levels of MDMA were reported by the Netherlands and have since appeared in Belgium, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

The levels of MDMA present in these tablets could lead to serious adverse events, including death. There have already been deaths associated with MDMA caused by such tablets. For example, in June 2013, Dutch authorities registered the death of a 17 year-old girl where the victim was reported to have consumed a tablet which contained 200 mg of MDMA. In February 2014, Police Scotland reported one death and several non-fatal intoxications suspected to be linked to hazardous MDMA tablets (red in colour and featuring a Mortal Kombat logo) in Glasgow, United Kingdom.

MDMA tablets in the EU typically contain between about 60 and 100 mg MDMA (2012 figures), however, tablets containing between 150 and 200 mg of MDMA are currently available. Some tablets have been found containing even higher amounts and, in one case, a superman logo tablet (weighing 355 mg) contained 240 mg of MDMA. However, other tablets with dangerous levels have featured a range of different logos including Mortal Kombat, Superman, a butterfly, Mitsubishi, 'Li-ion' and Nintendo (see pictures below). It is important to note that no illicit tablets can be considered safe as they can contain unexpected ingredients in unpredictable amounts.



Why is this relevant?

This development is particularly concerning in light of the significant increase in the production and availability of MDMA in the EU. As outlined in the SOCTA 2013 and the EU Drug Markets Report 2013, Belgium and the Netherlands remain centres of synthetic drugs production in the EU and are also among those Member States most affected by the recent resurgence in MDMA availability. Previous to the substantial increase in MDMA production over the past three to four years, a shortage in the availability of precursors resulted in tablets containing much lower amounts of MDMA. The high levels of MDMA in tablets now entering the market may lead to serious harms.