

Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System (DAMIS)

Activity summary report

October 2020 – March 2021

Background

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to find out about emerging trends in drug and alcohol misuse, so we can act quickly and provide relevant information or advice to those who misuse drugs or alcohol. Much of the information sent out through DAMIS is practical advice aimed at reducing the harms to people from their drug use. It is aimed at adults, and those working with young people should exercise their professional judgement to ensure that any information passed on to people under 18 is appropriate.

The kind of information DAMIS collects includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs becoming available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects

The Department of Health oversees DAMIS with support from lead partners: the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Forensic Service Northern Ireland (FSNI).

Representatives of these agencies form the DAMIS Steering Group.

DAMIS is essentially an e-mail network of individuals who work for specialist drug and alcohol services, or for services that work with or treat people who misuse drugs or alcohol (for example homeless services, or Emergency Departments (ED's)). These people have access to information on emerging drugs and their impact on people who use them, and are ideally placed to pass on timely information to DAMIS. Their roles also give them the opportunity to provide timely harm reduction information to their clients.

Those on the DAMIS Network email information they have on substances of concern to a central email address. The information contained in these emails is shared with the DAMIS Steering Group for consideration. However, DAMIS is a confidential system and the identity of anyone who sends in emails is seen only by the PHA coordinators.

People who wish to be added to the DAMIS Network can contact the PHA coordinator to request an application form which they can complete, indicating their role in provision of drug and alcohol, and/or other related services.

As at April 2021, there were 406 individuals on the DAMIS network.

The following tables summarise key information received by DAMIS, and circulated by DAMIS, in the 6 months from October 2020 – March 2021.

Information / Emails received by DAMIS October 2020 – March 2021

Date	Topic
8 th October 2020	<p>Drugs and alcohol in schools</p> <p>PSNI (Newry District) telephoned PHA duty room to provide information of an incident where an ambulance was sent to a school for two pupils that smoked an e-cig which contained THC</p> <p><i>Action: Noted for information</i></p>
16 th October 2020	<p>Vaping</p> <p>Intelligence received on a further three incidents of vaping unknown substances by young people within the Antrim and Newtownabbey district</p> <p><i>Action: Follow up information DAMIS email issued 16th October 2020</i></p>
18 th November 2020	<p>Heroin</p> <p>Information received of suspected strong heroin in circulation in Belfast City Centre resulting in a few service users overdosing.</p> <p><i>Action: additional information received that overdoses were possibly due to suspected illicit supply of Xanax - DAMIS alert issued 20th November 2020</i></p>
20 th November 2020	<p>Spice vaping liquid</p> <p>Information received about a number of adverse incidents relating to a significant supply of what is thought to be spice vaping liquid being brought into a school in Belfast.</p> <p><i>Action: Noted for information</i></p>
10 th December 2020	<p>For Information</p> <p>Reports of 5 vaping incidents in the Derry / Strabane area involving 4 children who were unwell after vaping.</p> <p><i>Action: Noted for information</i></p>
15 th December 2020	<p>Additional information on vaping (Western)</p> <p>The child who was the source of a vape oil incident reported that they had purchased it online believing it was THC/CBD or some form of cannabis type oil.</p> <p>The child had vaped it previously and had offered it to two other students believing it was “strong vape oil” and THC/Cannabis oil.</p> <p>The hospital suspect it was SPICE – this has been unconfirmed.</p>

	<p>The vape oil was a clear bottle, white lid with yellow liquid.</p> <p>Action: Further information DAMIS email issued on 17th December 2020</p>
17 th December 2020	<p>Further information submitted on incident of vaping</p> <p>Reports of an additional two incidents which took place over the past 48 hours.</p> <p>The first is a young person was offered vaping oil on a bus traveling to and from the school. They immediately collapsed and an ambulance was called to attend to them.</p> <p>The second was in mid-Ulster, where a report was that a young person had collapsed and had medical intervention.</p> <p>Action: additional information sought to confirm vaping was involved in incidents, with 3 emergency responses to pupils at a school over a 2-3 week period;</p>
18 th December 2020	<p>Further information submitted on incidents of vaping</p> <p>Reports of a group of pupils had been caught smoking suspected THC/Spice in the bathroom at a school in Co. Armagh.</p> <p>One of the children was brought to hospital due to an adverse reaction.</p> <p>Action: for noting as Connections and PSNI are working with the school</p>
18 th December 2020	<p>Suspected THC/Spice (same incident as above)</p> <p>Reports of a group of pupils had been caught smoking suspected THC/Spice in the bathroom at a school in Co. Armagh.</p> <p>One of the children was brought to hospital due to an adverse reaction.</p> <p>Action: for noting as Connections and PSNI are working with the school</p>
21 st December 2020	<p>Pregablin</p> <p>Information received from the Lurgan area of a new variation of Pregabalin tablets, called 'signatures', an Indian brand. The tablets are reportedly 10 times more potent and they come in a strip of 15. The service user network in Lurgan has reported the effects to be significantly stronger however no adverse effects have been reported thus far.</p> <p>Action: Request for further information DAMIS email issued 22nd December 2020</p>
2 nd January 2021	<p>Hospital admissions re cocaine use</p> <p>Information received from the PSNI that 3 individuals were rushed to the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) on Friday night as a consequence of suspected cocaine use. The 3 individuals were brought in at different times from different locations within the East Belfast area.</p> <p>One of the individuals was in cardiac arrest and the other two in a</p>

	<p>serious condition, with the RVH suspecting a contaminated batch of cocaine.</p> <p>Action: DAMIS alert issued on 7th January 2021</p>
5 th January 2021	<p>Addition information on hospital admission</p> <p>There is no indication of a link between the three individuals</p> <p>Action: DAMIS alert issued on 7th January 2021</p>
11 th February 2021	<p>Request of information from HSE re strong heroin and crack</p> <p>Request for information regarding clients reportedly getting strong heroin from Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Another client stated had smoked what they were told was crack cocaine, and had an adverse response. They didn't know if the crack was mixed with something else or if it was another substance.</p> <p>Action: No information received via DAMIS to support these reports</p>
17 th February 2021	<p>Possible spice related incident</p> <p>Unconfirmed reports of an incident in the South Down area of a young person who is reported to have lost their life through drowning while under the influence of "Spice".</p> <p>Action: Service provider to provide further / more accurate information if possible to confirm reports.</p>
20 th February 2021	<p>Liquid suspended THC</p> <p>Information received from Neighbourhood Policing Team regarding "Cannabis with Syrup" – 1000mg of 90% pure THC Distillate, which they have come across.</p> <p>This appears to be an extremely concentrated form of Cannabis which users are mixing with something fizzy. E.g. Fanta.</p> <p>Reports that it may come from America and is becoming widely available.</p> <p>Action: Request for further information DAMIS email issued 1st March 2021</p>
26 th February 2021	<p>Cannabis with syrup</p> <p>Further information received in relation to a new derivative of Cannabis which has been recently seized from a youth by PSNI in Newry, Mourne & Down area.</p> <p>The item seized was labelled 'Cannabis with syrup – potent pain relief' and is purported to contain 100ml of 1000mg of 90% pure THC Distillate. From Police enquiries it is likely to be taken by users adding it to bottles of Coca Cola, Fanta and potentially mix with Alco-pop's.</p> <p>There is a concern regarding the risk of overdose or extreme intoxication to any person, particularly young people. No obvious cannabis type</p>

	<p>smell has been reported with this product.</p> <p>Action: Request for further information DAMIS email issued 1st March 2021</p>
1 st March 2021	<p>Diversion of Espranor</p> <p>Request from pharmacy colleagues within the HSCB for any information received on reports on the potential diversion of Espranor® by patients for onward manipulation for personal use or for sale.</p> <p>Action: DAMIS emailed issued to DAMIS steering group, PHA locality leads and PHA service providers to request information</p>
5 th March 2021	<p>Additional Information on THC / Cannabis Syrup</p> <p>Service provider provided information that some young people in the Southern Trust being aware of this product but have not reported using it.</p> <p>Action: Noted for information</p>
29th March 2021	<p>Paediatric hospital admission from vaping</p> <p>Information received via PHA duty room regarding a paediatric hospital admission resulting from a vape suspected of containing cannabis.</p> <p>Action: Noted for information</p>

Alerts issued by DAMIS during October 2020 – March 2021

In some cases, more information was sought either from the original informant, or from other experts in the field (addictions staff, homeless staff and drug users) and DAMIS partners continued to monitor the situation. In some cases, information was sent to specific groups, for example GP Practices, or Needle Exchange Providers, if the information was particularly relevant to / or would impact on their client group.

In some cases, information was considered to be of sufficient urgency for it to be circulated to the full DAMIS database in the form of an 'alert'. Information of general interest was also circulated to the full DAMIS database. Formal emails issued are shown in the table below. Unless specified otherwise, these were sent to the full DAMIS database.

Formal emails circulated by DAMIS to the full DAMIS database October 2020 – March 2021	
Date	Topic
15 th October 2020	<p>REQUEST FOR INFORMATION - Orajel (active ingredient benzocaine)</p> <p>DAMIS has received information of an incident in Scotland where an individual purchased all the stock of Orajel (a dental gel) from a supermarket which has an active ingredient benzocaine.</p> <p>Request to DAMIS Network for any information relating to similar incidents in Northern Ireland</p>
16 th October 2020	<p>FOLLOW UP INFORMATION - smoking of substances with E-Cigarettes</p> <p>DAMIS has received information regarding an additional 3 incidents involving young people within Antrim and Newtownabbey area who are suspected of vaping a liquid form of cannabis through E-cigarettes, increasing the number of incidents across the province.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided as well as request for further information</p>
20 th November 2020	<p>DAMIS ALERT - Increased level of illicit Benzodiazepines</p> <p>DAMIS has been notified that an illicit supply of Xanax is currently widely available in large amounts in Belfast city centre. There are reports of a number of cases where people have been heavily</p>

	<p>under the influence having used these tablets, with one individual overdosing and admitted to hospital. Alprazolam is a benzodiazepine commonly known as Xanax.</p> <p>There are also reports of stronger than normal heroin possibly in circulation.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as a request for further information</p>
<p>17th December 2020</p>	<p>FURTHER INFORMATION: Vaping substances with E-cigarettes</p> <p>In addition to the information received by DAMIS over the previous few months regarding young people vaping substances with E-cigarettes, DAMIS has been notified that a child, who was the source of a vape oil incident, reported that they had purchased online, believing it was THC. The child had vaped it previously and had offered it to others, believing it was “strong vape oil” but resulted in the hospitalisation of 2 young people. The hospital suspect it was spice – this has been unconfirmed. The vape oil was in a clear bottle, white lid with yellow liquid.</p> <p>Samples sent for analysis to date have consisted of multiple dropper bottles containing a variety of brightly coloured liquids. Labelling was mostly associated with a flavouring and included ‘Cherry Cola’, ‘Candy Floss’, ‘Bubblegum’ amongst others. The synthetic cannabinoids MDMB-4en-PINACA and 4F-MDMB-BINACA were detected in the liquid. It is believed the liquid were purchased as CBD, although there was nothing on the label to suggest this or indeed content of ingredients. This substance is being intensively monitored by the European early warning system due to potential health concerns.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided as well as request for further information</p>
<p>22nd December 2020</p>	<p>REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – Pregablin</p> <p>DAMIS has received information from the Lurgan area of a variation of Pregabalin tablets, called ‘signatures’, supposedly an Indian brand. The tablets are reported to be 10 times more potent and they come in a strip of 15. The service user network in Lurgan has reported the effects to be significantly stronger.</p> <p>Information provided on Pregablin with harm reduction advice and request for further information.</p>

<p>7th January 2021</p>	<p>DAMIS ALERT – Contaminated supply of cocaine</p> <p>DAMIS has received information from the PSNI on potential increased risks due to a suspected contaminated supply of cocaine in the East Belfast area. Three individuals were rushed to the Royal Victoria Hospital on Friday night as a consequence of suspected cocaine use. One individual was in cardiac arrest and the other two in a serious condition. The three individuals were brought in at different times from different locations within the East Belfast area.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided as well as request for further information</p>
<p>28th January 2021</p>	<p>THN ANNUAL REPORT</p> <p>PHA press release – PHA Take Home Naloxone reverses more than 160 overdoses</p> <p>New figures from the Public Health Agency (PHA) show that the Take Home Naloxone programme saw naloxone administered 180 times in 2019-20 and was successful in reversing an opiate overdose in over 91% of cases.</p> <p>The full press release can be viewed below and at Take Home Naloxone reverses more than 160 overdoses HSC Public Health Agency</p> <p>The 2019-20 Annual report on the supply and use of Take Home Naloxone is attached and can be found at Take Home Naloxone Reports HSC Public Health Agency</p>
<p>1st March 2021</p>	<p>REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Cannabis with syrup</p> <p>DAMIS has received information of a new derivative of Cannabis (Cannabis with syrup) which has been recently seized by PSNI from a young person who ordered it via a social media platform.</p> <p>Cannabis with syrup states on the bottle that it provides potent pain relief and is claimed to contain 100ml of 1000mg of 90% pure THC Distillate. It is reportedly taken by users adding it to bottles of Coca Cola, Fanta and potentially mix with Alco-pop's, with a risk of overdose or extreme intoxication. There is no obvious cannabis type smell reported with this product.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided as well as request for further information</p>

18th March
2021

Outbreak of Hep C and HIV associated with injecting drug use

PHA are aware of an outbreak of Hepatitis C and HIV associated with injecting drug use, including heroin and cocaine. PHA has had ongoing engagement, and will continue to work with, those organisations who work directly with injecting drug users to address this issue.

Hepatitis is a disease that can seriously damage your liver and make you very ill if you do not get treatment. Hepatitis C can be cured with treatment and HIV can be treated.

Information provided on Hep C, HIV, access testing, support services available including Needle Exchange services as well as harm reduction advice

DAMIS - Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System Summary report

What is DAMIS?

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to identify, verify and assess emerging threats and potential trends in drug and alcohol misuse within Northern Ireland, so we can act quickly and provide relevant information or advice to those who misuse drugs or alcohol. The purpose of DAMIS is to share information via email amongst people who work with drug users within Northern Ireland (the DAMIS Network). These people can provide information on emerging issues at a **very early** stage and are also ideally placed to provide targeted harm reduction information to their clients.

The kind of information DAMIS collects includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs become available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects.

The Department of Health oversee DAMIS with support from the lead partners: Department of Justice, Public Health Agency, Police Service of Northern Ireland and Forensic Service Northern Ireland.

Collecting information

Every year, Northern Ireland-wide surveys are carried out to find out what drugs people are using and how much alcohol they are drinking. This information helps organisations decide the priority actions required to reduce drug misuse or drug-related harm. However, these surveys are not designed to gather localised information on drugs being used by small numbers of people, or information on urgent issues such as contaminated drugs. This is what DAMIS is for. It can identify trends and issues at an early stage and warn people about them quickly.

The information which DAMIS receives usually comes from local drug and alcohol support organisations, or from people who misuse or have misused substances themselves. These people may have contact with a wide range of individuals who misuse substances and are in an ideal position to tell us what is happening in their local area as soon as it happens. While DAMIS can be used to alert people to emerging risks around alcohol as well as drugs, so far, all DAMIS alerts have focussed on drugs.

DAMIS is confidential – this means that when we collect information, we do not ask about who is misusing drugs. We do not need to know the names of individuals, but it can be useful for us to know general information like where drugs are being used, and the gender and age of users. This can help tell us who is at risk and to which particular groups we may need to give information.

Anyone can send information to DAMIS at damis@hscni.net .

What happens next?

Each lead organisation has identified a named member of staff to coordinate this work. All information sent to DAMIS at damis@hscni.net is received by the PHA DAMIS Coordinator, who removes any identifying details (e.g. who the email is from, or any information which could identify an individual drug user), then sends it on to the DAMIS Steering Group. The “level” of the information and what kind of response is needed is agreed by the DAMIS Steering Group.

Level One:

A level one response will be to record the information which may be used to inform policy and practice.

Level two:

A level two response means that the information will be circulated the information to everyone on the DAMIS database, either to seek more information, or as an alert or a bulletin. We ask everyone on the database to pass the information on as appropriate.

Alert – an alert is an email sent quickly (usually within 24 hours of receiving sufficient information) warning people of a specific risk. An alert may be sent when we still have limited evidence, but the need to inform people of a possible risk outweighs the need to collect more evidence.

Bulletin – if we need more information on an issue, a request for information is sent to the DAMIS network. Information received can then be pulled together and sent out as a bulletin. This takes longer than an alert to produce, but can provide a fuller picture of the Northern Ireland situation.

Level three:

A level three response means that a formal warning letter is issued through Chief Medical Officer procedures, and consideration is given to information/awareness raising with the public.

Who is on the DAMIS database?

The database includes around 410 people, individuals who work for specialist drug and alcohol services, or for services that work with or treat people who misuse drugs or alcohol (for example homeless services, or Emergency Departments (ED's)). These people have access to information on emerging drugs and their impact on people who use them, and are ideally placed to pass on timely information to DAMIS. Their roles also give them the opportunity to provide timely harm reduction

information to their clients. Much of the information sent out through DAMIS is practical advice aimed at reducing the harms to people from their drug use. It is aimed at adults and those working with young people should exercise their professional judgement to ensure that any information passed on to people under 18 is appropriate.

People who wish to be added to the DAMIS Network can contact the PHA coordinator to request an application form, by emailing damis@hscni.net, which they can complete, indicating their role in provision of drug and alcohol, and/or other related services.

Drug and Alcohol Monitoring Information System (DAMIS)

Application to sign up to DAMIS Network

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to identify, verify and assess emerging threats and potential trends in drug and alcohol misuse within Northern Ireland. It is an information sharing tool in support of the wider DAMIS partnership which comprises Department of Health, Department of Justice, Public Health Agency, Police Service of Northern Ireland and Forensic Service Northern Ireland. Representatives from these agencies form the DAMIS Steering Group, and they make decisions about how to act on any information received.

The purpose of DAMIS is to share information via email amongst people who work with drug users within Northern Ireland (the DAMIS Network). These people can provide information on emerging issues at a **very early** stage and are also ideally placed to provide targeted harm reduction information to their clients.

The kind of information DAMIS collects and shares includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs become available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects.

Because DAMIS is an early warning system and information fed into it is acted upon quickly, emails sent to the DAMIS Network are often based on anecdotal and/or unsubstantiated evidence and should be treated with initial caution. Many of the reports received by DAMIS are second or third-hand information from a single source, and are not supported by any additional evidence.

If information received by DAMIS is substantiated then the Steering Group considers how best to further share that information with the target groups. Evidence suggests that providing warnings about drugs to the whole population, the majority of whom do not use drugs, can normalise drug use, and increase experimentation with drugs. It is therefore vital that information is shared appropriately and treated with the strictest of confidence.

Much of the information sent out through DAMIS is practical advice aimed at reducing the harms to people from their drug use. DAMIS is aimed at adults. Those working with young people should exercise their professional judgement to ensure that any information passed on to people under 18 is appropriate.

DAMIS alerts/ emails or information contained within them should not be shared or posted on social media or to be shared with the media. If it is appropriate for information from DAMIS to be shared with the general public, PHA Communications will adapt this information in terms of public and/or targeted health messaging via agreed procedures.

DAMIS Network Application Form

If you are interested in receiving Drug and Alcohol alerts please fill in the required information below.

Name:

Organisation:

Job title:

Email address:

Please outline why you would like to receive these alerts and who you will share these with:

Those registered with the Drug and Alcohol Monitoring Information System can email information they have on substances of concern to a central email address of PHA coordinators who will share information with the DAMIS partners. (*DAMIS is a confidential system and the identity of anyone who sends in emails is seen only by the PHA coordinators*). Please outline how your job / role will enable you to provide information to DAMIS:

I have read the information on page 1, and understand the purpose of DAMIS, and will seek to ensure that I treat any information I receive from DAMIS appropriately.

Signed:

Date: