# Ketamine use among schoolchildren surges as health risks and social media influence spike



Experts are sounding the alarm as ketamine, often referred to as 'K' or 'Special K', increasingly enters the lives of school children, particularly during lunch breaks. This troubling trend has led to it being perceived by some as a 'rite of passage', a notion that highlights a disturbing acceptance of drug use among younger generations.

Mark O'Hagan, headteacher of Sacred Heart Catholic Academy in Crosby, Liverpool, has voiced his concerns. He stated that awareness of ketamine has surged among students over the past several years. “Six or seven years ago, we didn't really know what ketamine was. Now, it's in the common language of the children and for lots of children they do, unfortunately, see this as almost like a rite of passage,” he explained during an interview. This cultural shift, he argues, normalises risky behaviours around drug use.

The implications of such usage are severe. As highlighted by Dr. Verity Sullivan, a sexual health consultant, the physical health ramifications—particularly urinary tract issues—are alarming. She noted that more pupils are experiencing painful urination and frequent bathroom visits, with some even reporting blood in their urine after regular ketamine use. With reported cases of urinary tract infections on the rise, the health risks continue to escalate.

Merseyside’s police and crime commissioner, Emily Spurrell, echoed these sentiments, urging for greater awareness among young people regarding the dangers associated with ketamine. She indicated that many are ignorant of the long-term health effects, which are becoming increasingly evident as more individuals report significant health issues stemming from their usage.

The surge in ketamine use among young Britons, particularly those aged 16 to 24—often referred to as 'Generation K'—is alarming. Recent data from the Office for National Statistics reveals a staggering 650% rise in deaths related to the drug since 2015, averaging nearly one death per week. Usage rates have not only soared; they have tripled among young adults since 2016. Figures show that 3.8% of individuals in this age group reported using ketamine last year, a considerable increase from previous years.

The accessibility of the drug plays a crucial role in its popularity among youth. Priced at around £10 per gram, ketamine is cheaper than other recreational drugs, making it an easily attainable option for many. Scott Ardley, a senior treatment advisor at Rehabs UK, noted that dealers frequently target young people online, with applications like Snapchat facilitating transactions through their disappearing message features.

Social media also significantly contributes to ketamine's rising profile. Platforms like TikTok have become hotspots for content that trivialises the effects of the drug, often showcasing users in altered states known as 'k-holes'. Ian Hamilton, an addiction expert at the University of York, remarked that these online trends not only promote ketamine use but also risk leading to tragic outcomes similar to challenges that have resulted in fatalities.

Compounding the issue, a significant increase in treatment requests for ketamine misuse has been observed. In the past year alone, over 3,600 individuals sought help for ketamine-related problems, a stark contrast to just 425 individuals in 2014. As early intervention becomes critical, it's evident that the societal ramifications of ketamine use are far-reaching and demand urgent attention.

As authorities work to combat this escalating crisis, there’s an urgent need for education around the severe consequences of ketamine consumption. The challenges faced by youths today, exacerbated by peer pressure and social media influences, underline the importance of responsibility on both a societal and individual level to mitigate the health risks associated with this increasingly popular drug.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 3, 4, 6, 8
2. Paragraph 2, 7
3. Paragraph 2, 7
4. Paragraph 2, 7
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 6

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724967/warning-drug-rite-passage-school-children-lunch-breaks.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.priorygroup.com/addiction-treatment/ketamine-addiction-treatment/ketamine-use-statistics> - This article provides comprehensive statistics on ketamine use in the UK, highlighting a significant rise in usage among young adults. It reports that in 2024, 3.8% of individuals aged 16-24 used ketamine, marking a 231% increase since 2013. The article also discusses the health implications of ketamine use, including potential bladder and urinary tract problems, and notes a substantial increase in treatment cases for ketamine misuse, with 3,609 individuals starting treatment in 2023-24, over eight times higher than in 2014.
3. <https://www.freedommag.org/news/generation-k-the-hidden-crisis-of-ketamine-addiction-among-uk-youth-a71fc7> - This article examines the surge in ketamine use among UK youth, particularly those aged 16 to 24, referred to as 'Generation K.' It highlights a significant increase in ketamine usage within this demographic, with 2.9% reporting use in 2023–2024, up from 0.8% in 2012–2013. The piece also discusses the accessibility of ketamine through social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram, contributing to its widespread use among young people.
4. <https://providenceproject.org/rehab-treatment/ketamine-statistics/> - This article presents detailed statistics on ketamine use in the UK, noting that in 2023, 3.8% of individuals aged 16-24 reported using ketamine, reflecting a rising trend among young adults. It also highlights the health impacts of chronic ketamine use, including severe bladder and urinary tract problems. The article discusses the increase in treatment cases for ketamine misuse, with the number of requests for ketamine treatment doubling in 2023, and notes that men are more likely to use ketamine than women.
5. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35076151/> - This study examines the association between recreational ketamine use and depressive symptoms among high school seniors in the United States. It found that past-year recreational ketamine use was linked to a higher risk of experiencing current depression compared to other substances. The study also observed a dose-response relationship, with more frequent ketamine use correlating with an increased risk of depression, highlighting the mental health risks associated with ketamine use among adolescents.
6. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt47095/National%20Report/National%20Report/2023-nsduh-annual-national.htm> - This report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides comprehensive data on substance use and mental health in the United States for 2023. It includes detailed statistics on the misuse of various substances, including fentanyl, among different age groups. The report offers insights into trends in substance use and mental health indicators, serving as a valuable resource for understanding the landscape of substance use and mental health in the U.S.
7. <https://itsinthe.news/2025/02/25/the-disturbing-rise-of-ketamine-abuse-among-young-people/> - This article discusses the alarming rise of ketamine abuse among young people in the UK. It reports that the number of under-18s entering drug treatment who describe ketamine as one of their problem substances rose from 335 to 917 between 2020-21 and 2023-24. The piece also highlights a survey where 11% of 15-year-olds had been offered ketamine, indicating the widespread availability and use of the drug among adolescents.