# Ketamine use surges among young people with alarming health and mental risks



The reality of ketamine use has become a grim topic of discussion within families and among health professionals alike. Many people are taken aback when informed that a relative or friend might be using this drug; the shock often reflects a wider social disconnect regarding its rising popularity, particularly among the youth. In my experience working with patients suffering from emerging severe mental illnesses, the crash course on ketamine often highlights the drug's potential to incite psychosis and other severe mental health issues.

Emergency departments frequently report an influx of young people who have overdosed on ketamine, often arriving in alarming states of unconsciousness. Yet, tragically, many parents remain unaware that their children are experimenting with this substance. There’s an escalating culture among twentysomethings who believe that using ketamine is now a normative and harmless rite of passage—yet for many, this is simply not the case.

This trend is echoed by numerous reports confirming a significant uptick in ketamine consumption among 16- to 24-year-olds. According to official figures, the proportion of young people using ketamine in England surged from 1.2% to 3.1% between 2017 and 2018—the highest recorded figure since comprehensive records began in the mid-2000s. The Guardian highlights that this normalisation of drug use bears significant health risks, notably bladder damage that can lead to distressing, chronic conditions.

The societal acceptance of ketamine can be particularly alarming. Mark O’Hagan, headteacher of Sacred Heart Catholic Academy in Crosby, underscored this, stating, “Six or seven years ago, we didn’t really know what ketamine was. Now, it’s in the common language of the children." His insight reveals a worrying shift in perceptions, where drugs that once seemed alien have now embedded themselves into the fabric of adolescent culture.

Ketamine, commonly known as "special K" or simply "K," is a dissociative anesthetic originally developed for use as a tranquilliser. When administered in particular doses, users experience a euphoric and light sensation, yet higher doses can lead to a terrifying phenomenon known as a "k-hole"—a state of profound detachment from reality where one might struggle to communicate or even move. Many might laugh about these experiences, unaware that they come perilously close to life-threatening consequences. The disturbing reality is that a seemingly transient experience can conceal a significant and ongoing health risk, as evidenced tragically by notable cases, including the death of actor Matthew Perry, whose passing was linked to the effects of ketamine.

Frequent users face severe bladder issues, with studies indicating that nearly one in five will experience urinary symptoms, some as dire as ulcerative cystitis. Notably, a research study reported that nearly half of all habitual users suffer from these complications. The pain associated with these conditions can become unbearable, leading some to resort to increased ketamine use as a misguided coping mechanism, thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle.

Additional research underscores that prolonged ketamine use can also impair cognitive functions, manifesting as memory loss, reduced attention span, and heightened paranoia. It is vital for loved ones to recognise the signs of ketamine use: disorientation, slowed physical responses, nausea or vomiting, and altered interactions, which may erroneously resemble intoxication from alcohol. The stark reality is that many young users have not been adequately educated about these risks, necessitating proactive conversations within families.

The need for increased awareness and education about ketamine can hardly be overstated. As discussions around mental health and substance use evolve, it is essential for parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles to dispel ignorance surrounding the drug and to engage in these vital conversations. Free resources, such as talktofrank.com, can offer crucial insights to guide these discussions. If you suspect that someone you care about is using ketamine, don’t hesitate to seek help—an ambulance is a call away, and timely intervention can be lifesaving.

In confronting ketamine’s alarming ascent among young people, we must replace wishful thinking with awareness and education, ensuring that knowledge becomes a tool for prevention and intervention.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14747857/Ketamine-signs-functioning-addict-DR-MAX-PEMBERTON.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/04/ketamine-use-by-young-on-rise-official-figures-for-england-reveal> - An article from The Guardian reports a significant increase in ketamine use among young people in England. Official figures indicate that the proportion of 16- to 24-year-olds using ketamine rose from 1.2% to 3.1% between 2017 and 2018, marking the highest figure since records began in 2006-07. The article highlights concerns about the normalization of ketamine use among youth and the associated health risks, including bladder damage and depression. Experts emphasize the need for increased awareness and preventive measures to address this growing issue.
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4170372/> - A study published in the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) discusses the psychomotor and urological manifestations of ketamine abuse. The research highlights that frequent ketamine use can lead to severe bladder dysfunction, including symptoms like urinary frequency, urgency, and incontinence. The study emphasizes the importance of early recognition and cessation of ketamine use to prevent irreversible damage to the urinary tract. It also notes that the exact mechanism of ketamine-induced uropathy remains unclear, necessitating further investigation.
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9073215/> - This article from the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) examines ketamine-induced uropathy, a condition increasingly prevalent among young individuals. The study presents a case of an 18-year-old male who developed severe lower urinary tract symptoms and acute kidney injury due to ketamine use over a six-month period. The authors stress the importance of early diagnosis and cessation of ketamine use to prevent further health complications, highlighting the need for healthcare professionals to consider ketamine-induced uropathy in their differential diagnoses.
5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10399845/> - An article from the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) reviews the pathophysiology, clinical presentation, and management of ketamine-induced cystitis. The study notes that long-term ketamine abuse can lead to severe urinary tract symptoms, including increased frequency and urgency, bladder contracture, and potential kidney failure. The authors discuss the mechanisms by which ketamine metabolites cause inflammation and damage to the bladder lining. They emphasize that cessation of ketamine use is the primary treatment, with some cases requiring surgical intervention to restore normal urinary tract function.
6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC25606152/> - This study from the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) investigates the association between street ketamine use and bladder dysfunction. The research highlights that chronic ketamine abuse can lead to severe lower urinary tract symptoms, including dysuria, frequency, urgency, and gross hematuria. The study emphasizes the importance of early intervention and cessation of ketamine use to prevent irreversible damage to the urinary tract. It also discusses the challenges in diagnosing ketamine-associated bladder dysfunction due to its similarity to other urological conditions.
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC21955556/> - An article from the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) analyzes the prevalence of lower urinary tract symptoms among recreational ketamine users. The study found that 46% of participants reported symptoms such as dysuria, urgency, incontinence, and hematuria. The research suggests a relationship between the severity of symptoms and the dose and frequency of ketamine consumption. The authors advocate for early recognition and cessation of ketamine use to prevent the progression of symptoms and potential irreversible damage to the urinary tract.