

Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System (DAMIS)

Activity report

April 2019 – September 2019

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 September 2019, there were 413 individuals on the DAMIS network.

The following tables summarise key information received by DAMIS, and circulated by DAMIS, in the 6 months from April 2019 – September 2019.

Information received by DAMIS during April 2019 – September 2019

Emails received by DAMIS April 2019 – September 2019	
Date	Topic
10 th April 2019	<p>RAPID bin - blotters - WEDINOS result</p> <p>The sample Diane obtained from a RAPID bin in West Belfast was tested by WEDINOS. The result shows that a psychoactive was present. It is a psychedelic known as 2,5 dimethoxy-4-chloroamphetamine, or DOC for short. It sits in both the cathinone and amphetamine families; the assumption from this position is that it will be a stimulant. It is however, mainly a psychedelic.</p> <p>‘This is particularly dangerous, as DOC is not known to have the safety profile of LSD. It can be particularly unsafe, in comparison to LSD, for those suffering from hypertension, as amphetamine compounds are known to cause sharp increases in systolic blood pressure.’</p>
11 th April 2019	<p>Police issues warning on potential increased risk due to a contaminated supply of cocaine</p> <p>‘Detective Superintendent Bobby Singleton from PSNI’s Organised Crime Unit said: “Police have received information that there may be a contaminated supply of cocaine in the County Antrim and County Londonderry areas. The information suggests that anybody consuming these drugs could experience serious adverse effects.</p> <p>“All drugs carry risks and have the potential to be a poison. I’d appeal to anyone with any information on these or other suspected drugs in their community to contact police on the non-emergency number 101. Alternatively people can provide information anonymously through the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111, which is 100% anonymous and gives people the power to speak up and stop crime.”’</p>
3 rd May 2019	<p>Turkish Blues</p> <p>Information received about a new form of benzo in the Lurgan area - Turkish blues - small blue tablet with a split in the middle. Apparently they are 10x stronger than a typical 10mg diazepam and are being marketed as non-addictive.</p>

	<p>Additional information provided</p> <p>Currently, blue tablets marked with a score on one side have been found to contain the following benzodiazepines - diazepam, alprazolam or etizolam</p>
6 th May 2019	<p>Information received in response to DAMIS alert – Turkish Blues</p> <p>Anecdotal evidence of SU's who have possibly taken these diazepam report super strength of the tablets. The SU's have long term drug use background & would be regular users of large quantities of benzo's. Tablets are blue, smaller than pharmaceutical diazepam but thicker & 'chunkier' in appearance.</p>
24 th May 2019	<p>Have you received any alerts regarding DNP (a diet pill?). Apparently PHE and Food Safety agencies in England are going to be putting some messaging out about this</p>
4 th June 2019	<p>Overdoses in Belfast</p> <p>Information received from Belfast City Council's Drugs and ASB Officer, City Centre regarding three recorded drug overdoses this week all on Friday. All casualties did not respond to Naloxone treatment by NIAS. We are not sure on the current situation of those casualties. There may be a possibility of Xanax being taken by these individuals along with other opioid drugs.</p>
4 th June 2019	<p>Notification by NSES community pharmacy of an overdose incident in the alleyway behind his shop. The people who overdosed had come in and obtained needles from the needle exchange and then went directly to the alleyway behind his shop to use heroin. The pharmacist thinks they may have taken pregabalin before the heroin use.</p>
13 th June 2019	<p>Information received from a number of local sources In North Belfast and City/South Belfast around a product called 'Shatter'.</p> <p>This is being sold on the streets and through social media locally. The brand name is Coast Concentrates.</p> <p>The effects being reported are high paranoia, trippy effect similar to strong Salvia.</p> <p>Being sold in packs similar to (NPS) but reported to be high THC content as high as 95%.</p> <p>Also being sold as oils for vaping.</p>
24 th July 2019	<p>Enquiry from a local newspaper</p> <p>Request for information following reports of recent deaths in Derry were due to drugs but unsure of the drug involved although decreased reportedly had marks around their mouths and abuse of Fentanyl patches was suspected (<i>speculation</i>).</p>
12 th August 2019	<p>Information received that service users in NHSCT have reported an increase in illicit Pregabalin and whilst there have been several sudden</p>

	<p>deaths recently amongst drug users in the community it remains unconfirmed whether Pregabalin is linked</p>
<p>10th September 2019</p>	<p>Pregabalin in Derry area</p> <p>Information in regards to pregabalin circulating in the Derry area at present which has resulted in 4 unintentional OD requiring hospital admissions. These 4 young people (17 yr. olds) have used it in combination with diazepam however the pregabalin is reported to have a signature on the pack, 300 mg tablets. Apparently there is a delay in effect.</p> <p>Additional information provided</p> <p>this the 300mg in supply are smaller than the prescribed medication</p>
<p>16th September 2019</p>	<p>Media enquiry received regarding a possible Fentanyl related death in Enniskillen on Saturday</p> <p>Additional information received</p> <p>From unofficial figures, Fentanyl is suspected as being involved in up to 6 deaths so far in 2019, other drugs were also present in some cases.</p>
<p>20th September 2019</p>	<p>The result for a white tablet sent to WEDINOS on 20th June has come back and can be viewed at https://www.wedinos.org/db/samples/, reference no. 000042511.</p> <p>It has come back as flualprazolam, an analogue of alprazolam which is commonly known as Xanax. This result shows that novel benzodiazepines such as this and etizolam continue to be in circulation in the Belfast area. Given their potency over more commonly used benzos such as diazepam, should an alert be issued to potential users highlighting the risk of increased sedation and possible respiratory suppression especially when used with alcohol, opioids and gabapentinoids, as well as reinforcing the message to always test dose / harm reduction advice.</p>

Alerts issued by DAMIS during April 2019 – September 2019

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 April 2019 – September 2019	
Date	Topic
12 th April 2019	<p>DAMIS alert - 'blotters'</p> <p>DAMIS has received information on a psychedelic known as 2,5 dimethoxy-4-chloroamphetamine. Please make your service users aware that any 'blotter' they are offered may contain this drug rather than LSD.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided and request for further information</p>
19 th April 2019	<p>DAMIS alert - Contaminated supply of cocaine</p> <p>The PSNI have issued warning on potential increased risks due to a potentially contaminated supply of cocaine in the County Antrim and County Londonderry / Derry areas, based on information they have received. The information suggests that anybody consuming these drugs could experience serious adverse effects.</p> <p>Please advise anyone you work with or know who uses cocaine or similar substances to exercise extreme caution and to seek urgent medical attention if they become unwell following use of these substances.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided</p>
3 rd May 2019	<p>DAMIS alert / request for information – Turkish Blues</p> <p>DAMIS received information regarding benzodiazepines in the Lurgan area- Turkish blues. Small blue tablet with a split in the middle. Apparently they are 10x stronger than a typical 10mg diazepam and are being marketed as non-addictive.</p>

	<p>Please note that, to date, blue tablets marked with a score on one side have been found to contain the following benzodiazepines - diazepam, alprazolam or etizolam</p> <p>Request for further information as well as harm reduction advice, support services information and how to access naloxone provided</p>
4 th June 2019	<p>DAMIS Alert - drug overdoses / potential related death</p> <p>DAMIS received information of three recorded drug overdoses and a further potential drug related death in Belfast. While at this stage it is not known what, if any, substances had been taken, it is believed that the individuals may have taken Xanax or Pregabalin along with another opioid drug, probably street heroin. There are also unsubstantiated reports that the individuals may not have fully responded to Naloxone treatment.</p> <p>Request for further information, Harm reduction advice provided, information on Take Home Naloxone programme, information for people working with Pregabalin (Lyrica) users; for Pregabalin users themselves on reducing your risk of harm and Alprazolam (Xanax) provided</p>
19 th June 2019	<p>DAMIS alert - HSS(MD) 8/2019 Hospitalisation and Deaths Linked to Consumption of 2,4-Dinitrophenol (DNP): Rapid Treatment Required In Cases Of Suspected DNP Poisoning</p> <p>CMO issued an alert regarding hospitalisation and deaths linked to consumption of 2,4-dinitrophenol (DNP).</p> <p>DNP is a toxic industrial chemical that is unfit for human consumption and illegal for use in foodstuffs.</p> <p>Information to be shared with anyone who works with users of this substance as well as request for further information.</p>
10 th September 2019	<p>DAMIS alert - Pregabalin</p> <p>DAMIS received information regarding Pregabalin in the Derry area</p> <p>Pregabalin is circulating in the Derry area at present which has resulted in 4 unintentional OD requiring hospital admissions. These 4 young people (17 yr olds) have used it in combination with diazepam however the Pregabalin is reported to have a signature on the pack, 300 mg tablets, which are smaller than the prescribed medication. Apparently there is a delay in effect'.</p> <p>Request for further information as well as information on pregabalin and Pregabalin: Guidance for people working with Pregabalin users provided</p>

<p>19th September 2019</p>	<p>DAMIS alert - suspected drug related deaths</p> <p>DAMIS received information regarding potential use of Fentanyl in a number of suspected drug related deaths in 2019.</p> <p>From unofficial figures, Fentanyl is suspected as being involved in up to 6 deaths so far in 2019, other drugs were also present in some cases.</p> <p>DAMIS remains aware that fentanyl, a very strong opioid drug, has become available in Northern Ireland. Whilst it may not be widespread, it is extremely potent, and may be mixed in with another substance (for example heroin or cocaine). It may also be sold under the pretence it is another substance - we have had a recent report of a substance sold as cocaine which may have contained fentanyl.</p> <p>Request for further information, Harm reduction advice provided as well as contact details for Take Home Naloxone.</p>
<p>26th September 2019</p>	<p>DAMIS alert - sample result flualprazolam</p> <p>DAMIS notified that a result for a white tablet sent for analysis has come back as flualprazolam, an analogue of alprazolam which is commonly known as Xanax. This result shows that novel benzodiazepines such as this and etizolam continue to be in circulation in the Belfast area. Given their potency over more commonly used benzodiazepines such as diazepam, please continue to highlight to anyone you work with who uses these substances the risks of increased sedation and possible respiratory suppression, especially when used with alcohol, opioids and gabapentinoids, and as ever remind your clients / users to exercise extreme caution when taking any substance if they are unsure what is in it.</p> <p>Request for further information, key harm reduction advice provided including mixing drugs, Take Home Naloxone information on pregabalin (Lyrica) and on alprazolam (Xanax)</p>

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: the Public Health Agency, the Department of Justice and the Police Service of 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 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 480 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. Sometimes, the need to get information to a wider audience is sufficient that DAMIS will issue a media alert to raise awareness among the public.

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 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: