



Drugs (psychoactive)

Overview

Impact

WHO response

Psychoactive drugs are substances that, when taken in or administered into one's system, affect mental processes, e.g. perception, consciousness, cognition or mood and emotions. Psychoactive drugs belong to a broader category of psychoactive substances that include also alcohol and nicotine. "Psychoactive" does not necessarily imply dependence-producing, and in common parlance, the term is often left unstated, as in "drug use", "substance use" or "substance abuse".

Production, distribution, sale or non-medical use of many psychoactive drugs is either controlled or prohibited outside legally sanctioned channels by law. Psychoactive drugs have different degrees of restriction of availability, depending on their risks to health and therapeutic usefulness, and classified according to a hierarchy of schedules at both national and international levels. At the international level, there are international drug conventions concerned with the control of production and

distribution of psychoactive drugs: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, amended by a 1972 Protocol; the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances; the 1988 Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

Fact sheets



Information sheets



Data



Guidelines



Q & A



Governance documents



WHO teams



> 180 thousands

deaths

were directly linked to drug use disorders in 2019

GHE

News

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6 August 2021 | Departmental news

[Study to prevent deaths from opioid overdose shows promising results](#)

Our work

Improving prevention and treatment for drug use disorders

Fact sheets

4 August 2021

Opioid overdose

Events

Third WHO Forum on Alcohol, Drugs and Addictive Behaviours (FADAB)

📅 22 – 25 June 2021

Meeting of technical experts on public health responses to cannabis use

📅 18 – 20 December 2019

2nd WHO Forum on alcohol, drugs and addictive behaviours

📅 27 – 28 June 2019

Multimedia

27 October 2020

Drug overdose: a film about life

3 December 2018

UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs

Publications



11 November 2016

The health and social effects of nonmedical cannabis use

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18 August 2016

Drug use and road safety: a policy brief

[Download](#)

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10 October 2016

mhGAP intervention guide for mental, neurological and substance use disorders in non-specialized

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16 June 2012

The Alcohol, Smoking and Substance involvement Screening Test (ASSIST): manual for use in primary

[Download](#)

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Related health topics

Other

Alcohol

Health and wellbeing

Mental health

Communicable diseases

HIV/AIDS

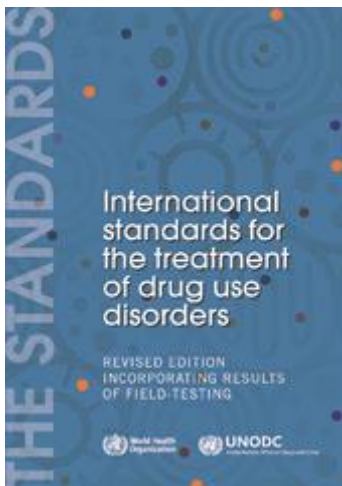
Physical environment

Road traffic injuries

Substances

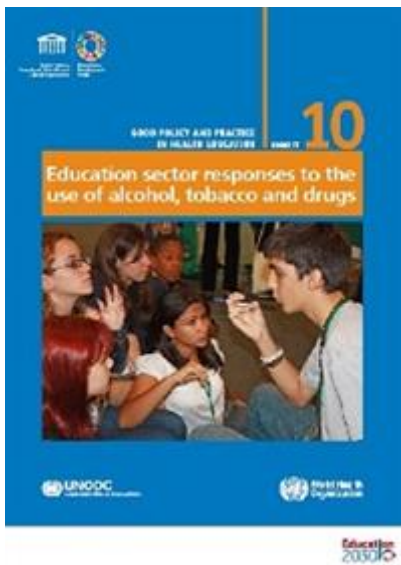
Tobacco

Related joint publications

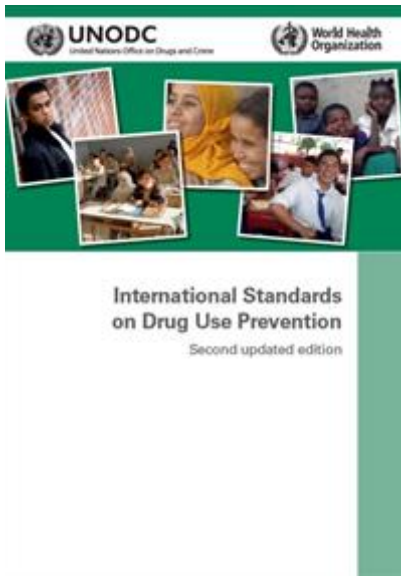


UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders

Revised edition incorporating results of field-testing



UNESCO/UNODC/WHO publication "Education sector responses to the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs"



UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention

Second updated edition



UNESCO/UNODC/WHO publication "Treatment and care for people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system"

Alternatives to Conviction or Punishment