

Welcome to this fortnight's SMRT Safeguarding Update...

WAKE UP WEDNESDAY

SNUS and Nicotine Pouches

This week's Safeguarding update is focused on SNUS, what it is, the legislation that covers it, what the effects of taking it are and what the signs are of young people using it.

If you have not heard of SNUS before, it is the name for a tobacco-based drug that is taken orally and placed by the gums for absorption. It is a Swedish word that is a shortened form of the word 'snustobak' that means 'snuff-tobacco'. The drug SNUS has proved to be popular across the UK amongst teens and has overtaken the widespread use of CBD gummies or 'weed gummies' that are also taken orally.

Snus is a type of smokeless tobacco product from Sweden. It is made from tobacco, nicotine, water, flavourings, sweeteners, and plant-based fibres.

Nicotine pouches look like snus and are used the same way. They are made from similar ingredients to snus, apart from they don't have tobacco in them. Nicotine is added to make you want to use them again and again.

In the UK:

- It is illegal to buy or sell snus
- It is legal to use snus if you are over 18
- It is legal to buy and sell nicotine pouches (for over-18s)





What are nicotine pouches?

- Also known as white snus, they contain nicotine extracted from tobacco leaves, sodium carbonate, flavourings, and sweeteners
- They often have a high pH value, an effect of the ingredient sodium carbonate, which allows the nicotine inside the pouch to penetrate the soft lining on the gum more quickly and enter the bloodstream, resulting in stronger nicotine kicks



How does it work?

It is placed between the upper lip and the gum, allowing nicotine to be absorbed through the mucous membrane. Unlike regular tobacco products, it doesn't need to be smoked or chewed, making it more discreet for consumption. Snus is usually sold in small pouches that look like tea bags or in loose form.

Although snus bypasses the inhalation of smoke and reduces some lung-related health risks, it has other serious implications. Its high levels of nicotine make it addictive, and its health

consequences, particularly on oral health, cardiovascular systems and cancer risk, remain a serious concern.

Health risks of snus

In young people, snus carries some severe consequences:

- **Addiction:** Due to the high nicotine content of snus, it is a very addictive form of tobacco, especially for younger users. Nicotine addiction creates problems with quitting tobacco products long-term.
- **Oral health:** Chronic use may cause gum disease, oral lesions and tooth loss. Snus is also linked to oral and pancreatic cancers.
- **Cardiovascular risks:** There is evidence that snus users suffer from hypertension and heart disease, with some of the studies showing that younger users may develop hypertension and heart disease sooner.
- **Schooling, learning and behaviour:** Nicotine is known to negatively affect the development of the adolescent brain, which may lead to the effects on learning, memory, and behaviour, which may affect mental health.

Celebrity endorsement and snus normalisation

What is most alarming is the growing number of famous people and celebrities, especially football players, who consume snus. Reports suggest that as many as one in five English footballers turn to snus or tobacco-free nicotine pouches to relax or deal with stress. Watching sports figures or other celebrities use snus is very influential for young fans whom they tend to idolise.

What to look out for (signs your teen may be using SNUS)

- You find small pouches or packets labelled "nicotine pouches", "snus style" or similar.
- Young person is holding something in their mouth (under lip/cheek) for extended time.
- Stains or irritation on inner cheek or gum.
- Sudden mood changes, irritability (nicotine withdrawal).
- Unexplained nausea, dizziness after use.
- If very strong, SNUS can cause the user to vomit.

What can you do as a parent or carer?

- **Keep open communication:** let them know they can talk to you without fear or judgement.
- **Model health behaviours:** avoid normalising nicotine use (even nicotine replacement!).
- **Set and reinforce expectations:** clarify that you expect them to avoid nicotine products.
- **Monitor:** know what products look like, check devices or packaging.
- **Provide resources:** share trusted information and helplines.
- **Work with schools/services:** if you suspect use, speak with your GP, health-services or Bristol Drugs Project.

What do we tell students?

Through VIP lessons, we speak to students about the risks of using any illegal or damaging substances. Lessons include a range of topics such as alcohol, smoking, vaping, SNUS and higher category drugs. There are also lessons included in the pastoral curriculum about SNUS and we have visiting speakers who educate about the dangers of substance misuse. We are aware that SNUS and nicotine pouches are one of the most common drugs being used by teens currently in the Bristol area.

Where to go for support?

For further information and direct links to services please see these websites:

<https://www.teenhealth.org.uk/health-topics/snus-parents/>

<https://www.horizonsbristol.co.uk/>

<https://www.bdp.org.uk/> (Bristol Drugs Project)

At St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School, support can be offered to students via the pastoral teams in each year group, as well as through the safeguarding and mental health leads at the school. Support may look like signposting, offering advice regarding a student's education and wellbeing or support with making any relevant referrals. Bristol Drugs project IS the key external agency who we work closely with to provide education and support for students regarding substance misuse.

There is also a weekly school health nurse drop in available in school, every Monday, where students can access support for substance concerns, sexual health, anxiety and a range of other health concerns young people may have.

As always, if you have any immediate concerns about safeguarding issues, students, or the school site, please get in touch via:

safeguarding@smrt.bristol.sch.uk