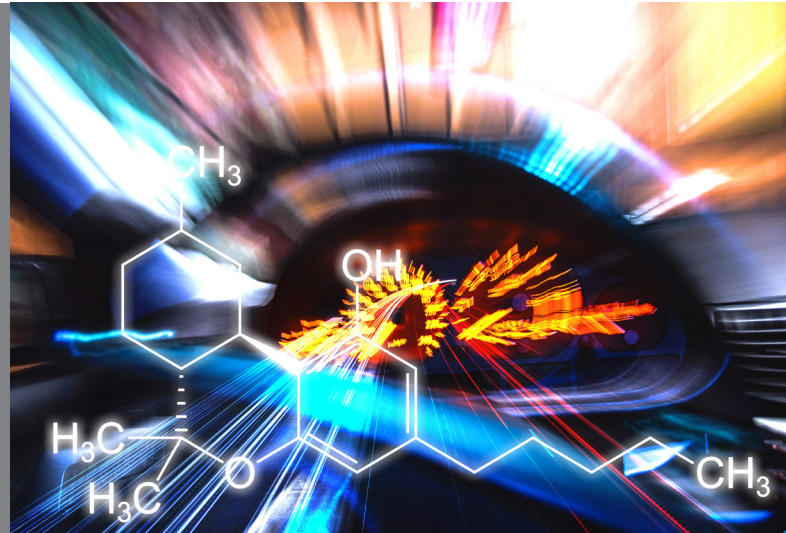


## HHC – a new drug trend in the NPS market

# NEWSLETTER

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## The grim reality of a legal high

**HHC is still legal in many countries. It's also easily purchased, promises an enjoyable high and, due its rapid spread, is causing alarm among authorities and governments. Of course, legal does not equal harmless, and users of HHC are at risk of negative and unpleasant side effects.**

In December 2022, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) held its first expert meeting on the subject of HHC. This was prompted by the identification of HHC in at least 13 EU Member States within a short space of time. At present, little official information about the drug is available. Instead, there are informal reports, and monitoring of Internet sales activities indicates that availability and consumption may be much higher than notified seizures would suggest.



**HHC is present in the hemp plant in very low quantities. Saleable quantities are usually semi-synthetic and produced using expensive laboratory techniques. The substances produced are also still legal in most parts of the world.**

Suppliers of HHC like to advertise it as a "legal alternative to THC". It is sold, for example, in the usual retail outlets and online shops, as well as in tobacconists, in 24-hour supermarkets and on Amazon. This attracts an increasing number of young and inexperienced consumers.

### What is HHC?

**HHC, short for hexahydrocannabinol, is by no means a new drug but is being sold as one. The substance was produced for the first time in 1947, and is a psychoactive cannabinoid that produces a high similar to THC. As yet, there have been no in-depth studies or research into the drug, and it is currently assumed that the effects and consequences both during and after consumption, as well as the side effects, are similar to those of THC.**

**HHC has four variants known as 9R, 9S, P and O, which differ in a small number of chemical details only. HHC-9R is the most common substance. 9S has no effects on the body or mind, and is largely irrelevant in terms of consumption. HHC-O has a stronger effect than 9R, while HHC-P is the variant with the strongest effect and is often sold in online shops with the warning "for experienced THC users only".**



HHC's "legal" status often conveys the false impression that it is harmless. In reality, the drug has many negative side effects, in addition to the fact that driving under the influence of a drug is against the law, even if that drug is "legal". While only a small number of laboratory studies of HHC have been conducted to date, the results indicate that the effects and side effects are similar to those associated with the use of THC. In addition, there has been no research into the damage that may be caused by the various heavy metal residues formed during the production process.

Again and again, publicly posted user reports indicate that HHC causes many more bad trips than THC. This is because the drug is slow to take effect, which can lead users – especially those who are inexperienced – to take an extra dose. Experiencing a trip with an excessive dose of HHC quickly becomes very unpleasant indeed.

## The legal situation

HHC can be manufactured in two different ways, i.e., it can be extracted directly from the hemp plant or can be made synthetically from THC or CBD. This means that, unlike other new psychoactive substances (NPS), HHC is not entirely synthetic. If the substance is made directly from the plant, it normally falls within the remit of narcotics legislation. However, HHC only exists naturally in very small quantities, and so it is very difficult to extract enough to satisfy market demands. For this reason, HHC products are normally made in a lab.

## Use of HHC can be detected

The use of HHC can be detected in bodily fluids using most standard THC tests. It is easily detected in blood by checking the relevant markers. HHC can also be detected in saliva in most cases.

DrugWipe 5 S, which detects the use of cannabis among other substances, shows higher HHC concentrations as a positive cannabis result. A more sensitive detection of HHC is only possible in a lab.

In many countries, lab-manufactured HHC is not currently prohibited by law but may be defined as an NPS. Some countries, such as Finland, Poland and Austria, have already done this and have banned HHC. Belgium and Hungary are also working on suitable regulations. Other countries like Germany, where HHC has not yet been made illegal, are discussing the question of whether a semi-synthetic substance can be defined as an NPS. In the United States, HHC is regulated by the Farm Bill, which legalises hemp products containing a low level of THC. HHC is illegal in Switzerland, where it is listed as a controlled substance.

Across the globe, including in Germany, sellers, consumers and authorities alike assume that HHC will be made an illegal drug in future.



**In addition to cannabis, DrugWipe® 5 S detects opiates, cocaine, amphetamines and methamphetamines – simply contact us, we're always happy to help!**

References: Drogentest Wien, Wien, [www.drogentest-wien.at](http://www.drogentest-wien.at); European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction EMCDDA, Lissabon; LADR der Laborverbund Dr. Kramer & Kollegen GbR, Geesthacht, [www.ladr.de](http://www.ladr.de); IFHA Institut für Hanfanalytik, Wien, [www.hanfanalytik.at](http://www.hanfanalytik.at); SRG SWI swissinfo, Bern, [www.swissinfo.ch](http://www.swissinfo.ch); Stadt Zürich Saferparty Streetwork, Zürich, [www.saferparty.ch](http://www.saferparty.ch)

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The DrugWipe saliva test on YouTube:



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