

## **Subject: Urgent: Identifying Early Signs of Ketamine-Related Health Issues in Children and Young People**

Dear Colleagues,

We are writing to raise urgent awareness regarding the increasing prevalence of ketamine use among children and young people within our borough. While public discourse often focuses on the behavioural impact of substance misuse, ketamine presents a serious and potentially devastating physical consequence: **Ketamine-Induced Cystitis (commonly referred to as Ketamine Bladder Syndrome)**.

### **What is Ketamine Bladder Syndrome?**

Ketamine Bladder Syndrome is a severe condition caused by damage to the bladder lining due to ketamine use. In young people, it typically presents with a rapid onset of serious lower urinary tract symptoms. The drug causes inflammation and destruction of the bladder wall, leading to a stiff, scarred organ with significantly reduced capacity.

If not addressed promptly through immediate cessation of ketamine use, this condition can result in irreversible harm. In the most severe cases, this may necessitate bladder removal (cystectomy) and lifelong management through the use of a stoma.

### **Key Warning Signs and Red Flags**

We urge all professionals, as well as parents and carers, to remain alert to the following indicators:

#### **In School and Community Settings:**

- **Urinary Frequency and Urgency:** A persistent and uncontrollable need to urinate, often as frequently as every 10–30 minutes
- **Increased Toileting Needs or Incontinence:** Repeated requests for toilet access, accidents, or the use of incontinence products
- **“K-Cramps”:** Severe abdominal or pelvic pain causing visible distress
- **Dysuria:** Reports or signs of burning or intense pain during urination

#### **In Clinical Settings (GPs and Nurses):**

- **Recurrent ‘UTI-like’ Symptoms:** Presenting symptoms consistent with urinary tract infection despite negative test results
- **Haematuria:** Presence of blood in the urine, sometimes discolouring urine to orange or brown
- **Reduced Bladder Capacity:** Frequent voiding of very small volumes of urine
- **Erectile Dysfunction:** A recognised complication in young males

- **Symptom Patterns:** Symptoms that worsen significantly following ketamine use

### Getting the Right Help at the Right Time

Early intervention is essential to prevent long-term or permanent organ damage. If a child or young person presents with any of the above symptoms, please prioritise the following pathways:

- **Referral to School Nursing Services:** For sensitive assessment and to support links between educational and healthcare settings
- **Children's Continence Services:** For early identification and intervention, including prompt referral to the GP for consideration of onward referral to a specialist Tier 3 service
- **Urgent GP Review:** To exclude infection and assess the progression of potential bladder damage

### Support for Children and Young People

If ketamine use is suspected, the following services are available to provide confidential advice and support:

- **Sutton Here4YOUth:** A specialist drug and alcohol service for individuals under 18  
Access support via: [Sutton Here4YOUth | Cranstoun](#)
- **Drugbot (Cranstoun):**  
An online tool providing advice and guidance for professionals and individuals regarding substance use:  
<https://drugbot.cranstoun.org/en>

Cranstoun services are also available to deliver training within schools and provide consultation or advice when required.

By recognising these symptoms at an early stage, we have an opportunity to intervene before a young person faces life-changing health consequences.

Thank you for your continued vigilance and commitment to safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people.

Yours sincerely,

**Sutton Health and Care Health Services** in partnership with **Cranstoun** and **Here4YOUth**