



Central Drug Authority

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MEDIA STATEMENT

On the Viral Trend of Learners Inhaling Fire Extinguisher Powder and the Importance of Protecting Youth Mental Health

The Central Drug Authority (CDA) has noted with grave concern the recent circulation of videos on social media showing learners deliberately inhaling or “smoking” powder from fire extinguishers in schools. This dangerous behaviour, which appears to be spreading as a viral trend among young people, poses serious and immediate risks to their health and wellbeing.

Fire extinguisher powder contains chemical agents that are not intended for human consumption and may cause severe respiratory distress, chemical irritation, poisoning, lung damage and other serious health complications. The CDA strongly warns learners that inhaling such substances can lead to life-threatening consequences.

This alarming trend also highlights deeper challenges affecting young people in South Africa, including peer pressure, exposure to harmful online trends, experimentation with dangerous and harmful substances.

Prevention Messages for Learners

The CDA urges learners to prioritise their health and safety and to resist pressure to participate in dangerous activities or viral trends.

- Do not inhale or ingest substances that are not meant for human consumption.
- Avoid participating in social media challenges that can harm your health.
- Speak to a trusted adult, teacher, school counsellor or health professional if you are feeling overwhelmed or under pressure.
- Look out for your friends and encourage them to make safe and healthy choices.

Advice to Parents and Guardians

Parents and caregivers play a critical role in protecting young people from harmful behaviours. The CDA encourages parents to:

- Talk openly with children about the dangers of viral social media trends and substance misuse.

- Monitor children’s social media activity and discuss the content they are exposed to online.
- Watch for warning signs such as sudden behavioural changes, withdrawal, anxiety, or signs of emotional distress.
- Encourage children to speak about their challenges and reassure them that support is available.
- Seek professional help early through schools, community social workers, or health services if a child shows signs of emotional distress, self-harm or risky behaviour.

Schools and families must work together to create safe environments where learners feel supported, heard, and protected.

The wellbeing of young people is a shared national responsibility. Government, schools, parents, and communities must act together to prevent harmful behaviours while strengthening support for young people.

The Central Drug Authority will continue to monitor this situation closely and work with relevant departments and partners to implement prevention and early intervention measures in line with the National Drug Master Plan, which prioritises the protection and wellbeing of children and youth.

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