



NEXSTART

This information has been developed by a cross-sector group looking to reduce risk for licensed premises and so ensure the safety of the public, premises staff and officers and provide clarity for all involved.

Drink Spiking

There are obvious concerns about the recent reports of “spiking” in hospitality venues. Drink spiking is not a new issue, but these latest incidents contain a more sinister element with allegations of substances being administered by needles.

There is also concern for the safety of the victims, who appear to consist mainly of female students. This comes at a time when the safety of women and girls in the night-time economy is a Government priority.

There are also reputational and commercial implications for the type of venues involved and the areas in which they are located.

It is therefore reassuring to see such a swift response from the authorities in the towns and cities affected, who have engaged with all the relevant parties, including the operators of licensed premises, to adopt a collaborative approach to the current situation.

The issue has arisen in several parts of the UK. On a national scale there are some interesting points to note:

- there have been no reports of secondary offending (e.g., sexual offences),
- only a limited number of toxicology results have been provided as yet, all of which have been negative for drugs, and
- there have been no criminal charges arising out of the allegations. By 25th November there had been more than 450 reports of needle spiking in the UK.

Based on these statistics, it is unclear whether the reports of needle spiking relate to actual usage of sharps or perceived only, and if actual, whether those were for the purposes of administering substances, or were “hoax” or copycat in nature. There is much about the current situation that is not understood at this time. There is no doubt that the issue attracted wide media attention in early November 2021 which appears to have abated.

Despite the uncertainty, the issue is being taken seriously and several measures have been proposed for implementation in licensed premises:

- all incidents of alleged spiking should be reported to the Police,

- appropriate training should be provided to relevant members of staff, and this is likely to be particularly helpful if it highlights wider issues about vulnerability in licensed premises, and the resources available
- searching procedures should be reviewed and amended as necessary,
- information (e.g., posters) regarding drink spiking may be provided,
- metal detectors (wands) may be used as a deterrent although they do not detect needles,
- test kits may be used, although there is no assurance of reliability as they have not been independently tested and verified.

Further information concerning the various resources available can be found in a jointly prepared Industry Association Factsheet:

<https://beerandpub.com/briefings/drink-spiking-faqs/>

The Government is also taking the matter seriously, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee has launched a new inquiry to understand better the prevalence of spiking and the effectiveness of the police response to it. Further details, including the timetable, can be found here:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1696/spiking>

It is obviously important that a clear message is sent out to reassure customers that the authorities and operators of licensed premises are making every effort to provide a safe and secure environment.

Please note that this document does not constitute legal advice but is the group's considered opinion of the matters contained within.

Dated: 13th December 2021

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