

Scottish Government submission of 1 June 2023

PE1995/C: Improve support for victims of spiking

Thank you for your correspondence dated 4 May, in which you requested a written response from the Scottish Government to a number of points raised during the Committee's most recent consideration of Petition **PE1995: Improve support for victims of spiking**.

The Petitioner, Catherine Anne Mckay, has called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to develop a multi-agency approach to investigating spiking incidents to ensure victims are given access to appropriate testing and incidents are investigated robustly.

I have set out information in response to the specific questions below, which I hope is helpful and addresses the points raised.

1. Whether there is a standard practice for Police Scotland and NHS boards to respond to suspected instances of spiking?

- Police Scotland responds to all reports of suspected spiking. Operation Precept is the national response in respect of this issue and the Precept guidance is available to officers on their intranet. This documents guidance for officers and staff and covers all action that should be taken when attending such an incident.
- Police Scotland also have available a Spiking Information Toolkit which is directed towards guidance and information for the licensed trade, rather than for police officers and staff.
- If a person presents to an Emergency Department concerned that they have been spiked, the clinical response is to respond to the presenting symptoms and carry out an assessment to make sure the person is safe and clinically well. Information on how to contact the police will also be provided should the person wish to do so.

- Where a person is concerned that they have been spiked via injection, there may be clinical concern regarding the transmission of potential blood-borne viruses. In such cases, the person would ordinarily be referred to sexual health services which are highly experienced in the prevention, testing for and management of blood-borne viruses.

2. Whether urine testing should take place as a standard practice in instances where it is suspected that an individual has been spiked?

- Early urine testing is the preferred method for detecting any drugs, although this cannot determine the likely level of impairment. Any samples provided are given with the consent of the person. It is important to note, in some cases, the reporter declines to provide any form of sample for analysis.
- There is no single blood or urine test which can determine if a person has been spiked and, if so, what a person may have been spiked with. Furthermore, toxicology testing is not available in all health boards. Regardless of any blood or urine test, it would not usually change the general treatment plan for that particular person, which is based on their symptoms and clinical condition at the time. This is further complicated by the fact that a blood or urine test is unable to determine whether any drugs found were taken by the person for recreational purposes or given against their knowledge or will.

3. Information on the guidance provided to NHS health boards on responding to suspected instances of spiking?

- No specific guidance is currently provided by the Scottish Government to health boards in terms of the clinical response to patient presentations that may involve spiking. Health care practitioners, including practitioners in Emergency Departments, will have access to relevant general clinical advice including that available from the [National Poisons Information Service](#). The Royal College of Emergency Medicine has also published a [statement](#) related to spiking.
- Where a person presents in an Emergency Department and considers that they may have been assaulted, including by being spiked, health care professionals will of course deal with

any clinical issues but also advise the patient that the police are the appropriate authority to pursue such a complaint.

- Where a person considers that they have been raped or sexual assaulted, whether or not a spiking is suspected, they may also seek healthcare and a forensic medical examination through the [NHS Sexual Assault Response Co-ordination Service \(SARCS\)](#).

I can advise that for some time the Scottish Government has taken a proactive approach to address concerns about the incidence of reported spiking in Scotland. Throughout 2022 several round-table meetings have taken place to help steer the joint Scottish Government and public sector response to the act of spiking. The round-tables brought together partners from across the justice system including policing, victims organisations and prosecution in addition to representatives from higher and further education, community safety and night time economy.

These meetings have been designed to discuss the range of initiatives and information available on spiking and to reassure the public that there is an ongoing co-ordinated response to the dangers of spiking, in whatever form it might take. This includes increasing training and awareness of spiking for night time industry staff and continuing to implement 'Equally Safe'- Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls.

In addition and in collaboration with partners, a Police Scotland Communications Toolkit was designed to provide consistent messaging and reassurance about Police Scotland's approach to incidents of spiking in pubs and clubs across Scotland.

At the end of 2022, and prior to the festive period, we published information on the [safer.scot](#) website, to inform and support the public around the subject of spiking. Recent feedback received from the University of Edinburgh stated that the online resource has been very helpful to those affected and they continue to signpost these materials on their own webpages. This website is currently undergoing a significant refresh to update messaging, and improve accessibility for users, which will be monitored and updated on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government will hold a further round-table meeting to seek updates from operational partners on their progress

to tackle incidences of spiking, to consider what further action may be required and to provide an opportunity to seek views on the extent to which partners consider that this forum provides the multi-agency response that the petition suggests .

I hope that the information set out in this letter is helpful to the Committee.