

Written evidence submitted by St John Ambulance (SPI0009)

Terms of reference

The Committee invites evidence on the following points:

- The prevalence of spiking
 - How common is spiking?
 - Where and when does it happen?
 - Who is vulnerable to spiking?
 - Who commits spiking offences and why do they do it?
- How spiking should be prevented and addressed
 - How effective is partnership working between the police and others (such as local authorities, the health service, night-time industries, universities and third sector organisations) in safeguarding potential and actual victims of spiking?
 - How effective are the measures used to prevent spiking, including the advice and guidance that is used to train, educate and support those involved in handling this type of crime (such as police officers, nightclub security staff and A&E staff)?
 - What barriers do victims face in reporting spiking incidents and obtaining treatment and support?
 - Are the police doing enough to identify perpetrators and bring them to justice?
 - What role should Government play in tackling this crime?

Evidence submission from St John Ambulance

Introduction

St John Ambulance (www.sja.org.uk) responds to health emergencies, supports communities, and saves lives. With our clinical expertise and nationwide presence, our volunteer-led health and first aid charity is uniquely placed to serve the country.

This submission to the Home Affairs Select Committee call for evidence centres on our direct experiences of responding to incidents of spiking and covers some, but not all, of the questions above.

1. About St John Ambulance's night-time economy support provision

St John Ambulance has provided night-time economy support provision in 22 areas in the last 12 months. We provide night-time economy (NTE) support provision in nine locations regularly, in England at present – and many more on an ad hoc basis, depending on demand. The teams respond to medical issues and incidents; illness and injury, including spiking.

St John Ambulance's Head of Clinical Projects, James McNulty-Ackroyd describes how the charity's NTE provision works, including how our teams respond to spiking and suspected spiking incidents:

“St John Ambulance primarily provide a safe space for those that may have been spiked. These individuals will often be assessed by our first aiders in the first instance and subsequently by a healthcare professional, such as a doctor, nurse or paramedic.

“Spiking is often evident though the history-taking process, in conjunction with abnormal clinical observations. Our teams will focus on assisting the individual, regardless of how they have come to be in that position and free from judgement.

“Our NTE sites have all the equipment you would expect from a frontline ambulance, often including an ambulance itself. Our healthcare professional volunteers have the ability to provide pre-hospital care to the same level as our NHS colleagues.

“We do not have the laboratory tests that our hospital colleagues have, nor the bed space and referral process to further look after these individuals. It is near impossible, pre-hospital to confirm that spiking has occurred, so we treat any obvious abnormalities and refer to hospital for further investigations and a period of safe observation.”

Whilst the majority of our NTE provision operations are based on a national model, this can sometimes differ depending on the level of support required per area. Our usual model consists of:

- 1x healthcare professional (HCP)
- 2x advanced first aiders
- 2x first aiders
- 1x double-crewed ambulance

Our work is led and delivered primarily by volunteers but can also include employees. All St John volunteers complete operational first aid as a minimum level of clinical training, in addition to this an HCP is always present.

St John Ambulance’s NTE provision is always delivered in partnership with other agencies. This video (filmed in autumn 2019) shows our team in central London, alongside the Soho Angels and is a good illustration of how we work: <https://youtu.be/TLtxrfET32w>

2. Commissioning models

St John Ambulance’s night-time economy provision is commissioned in many different ways, notably by local authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners, Business Improvement Districts, and other stakeholders, often working in partnerships focused on making people feel safe during nights out, reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, and relieving pressure on NHS services. Every project is different, but St John has increasingly developed and adopted a common approach to NTE support, so that standards are of consistently high quality.

3. St John Ambulance experiences of night-time economy provision

3.1 Nature of incidents

Within our night-time economy provision, St John Ambulance volunteers and staff members support and treat members of the public with a number of different presentations, including intoxicated by alcohol or drugs, injuries from assaults or accidents, minor injuries such as blisters, graze or small cut, pre-existing health condition, mental health, trauma and spiking (alcohol, drugs) confirmed/suspected.

3.2 NTE locations and data collection

We have been gathering data on our NTE work via a new dashboard since November 2021. Initially this covered our provision in four cities (the first four locations on the list below) but our data collection has since been expanded to encompass our provision in the following areas, and will cover additional NTE provision as towns and cities are added to our work (NB St John also provides NTE services in locations such as Taunton and Stourbridge where data has not been collected as yet):

Leeds
Manchester
Newcastle
Birmingham

Cambridge
 Ipswich
 Leicester
 Milton Keynes
 Norwich
 Nottingham
 Southampton
 Wolverhampton

3.3 Suspected spiking incident data from St John Ambulance

In the 14 NTE projects where we have collected data, between November 12, 2021, and January 7, 2022, 44 out of 667 incidents (7%) were of suspected spiking incidents.

Most of our NTE services have reports of spiking. Preliminary data indicates that Newcastle and Leeds have a slightly higher than average percentage of suspected spiking at 10% and 8% respectively. However, the sample size is still low so we can only take this as an indication. As our sample sizes build we will have more confidence in the data.

Spiking can happen at any time throughout the night, but most incidents are reported between 9pm and 3am.

Our early data shows us that females are more at risk of suspected spiking than males. Of the 44 suspected spiking incidents we have recorded since November 2021:

- 32 were female
- 10 were male
- 2 preferred not to state their gender

Below is a breakdown of suspected spiking incidents by age range:

| Age range | No of suspected spiking incidents | % of suspected spiking incidents |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 18-25 | 32 / 44 | 73% |
| 26-35 | 6 / 44 | 14% |
| 36-45 | 1 / 44 | 2% |
| 55 + | 1 / 44 | 2% |
| Under 18 | 4 / 44 | 9% |

3.4 Personal experience

St John Ambulance's Community Response Lead for the East of England, Mike Perkins gives a personal account of his experience dealing with a suspected spiking:

"Spikings and suspected spikings have become a more common call for us over the last six months that I have been working on the night-time economy projects. One of my personal experiences when working on one of our NTE treatment centres in Leicester is that we responded to a person who had been reportedly spiked who then became quite unwell, requiring care from our team of first aiders, ambulance crew and paramedic.

"We immediately jumped into action with our team, as well as partner agencies such as the police and local ambulance service, to provide the urgent care the patient required, as well as gathering as many details as possible about what had happened to the patient so the police could investigate.

“Through quick actions of door security, our team and the local hospital, this patient was able to go home after some careful monitoring and support.

“I personally felt astounded that we had to respond to an incident like this; no-one goes on a night out to be spiked, they go out to enjoy themselves and have fun. It's not okay for things like this to happen.

“We've since been in contact with the local clubs and bars, discussing how we can make nights out safer for everyone, with many of the clubs introducing 'anti-spiking' bottle caps and drinks covers.”

4. Public perceptions of night-time economy support

Research carried out by St John Ambulance via OnePoll in 2021 (survey of 2,000+ adults) revealed that:

- 67% would seek help from the NHS first, if someone was injured or fell ill on a night out;
- 44% would rely on bar, club or restaurant staff;
- 43% would lean on their friends and;
- 40% ask the police.

Meanwhile, the public is becoming increasingly aware of St John Ambulance's support for the night-time economy. Our OnePoll research carried out in early June 2021 saw 62% of respondents mention St John first aid services in town and city centres, but recognition increased to 68% when the question was asked again in October.

January 2022