

English summary
Risk assessment ketamine



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Coördinatiepunt Assessment en Monitoring nieuwe drugs

Bilthoven, July 2026

English summary

The Commissie Risicobeoordeling nieuwe drugs (Committee Risk Assessment new drugs) has assessed ketamine in accordance with the risk assessment procedure revised in 2025, examining both health risks and societal risks.

1. Health risks

Most users take ketamine incidentally and experience little to no health effects. However, when combined with other substances or when used frequently and intensively—where higher doses are taken—moderate to severe health effects may occur, particularly in relation to the urinary tract and gallbladder. Severe, irreversible harm occurs almost exclusively in a relatively small but possibly growing group of intensive users. Within this group, the risk of psychological dependence, tolerance, and a vicious circle of use and harm is also increased. Physical dependence is rare.

2. Societal risks

Ketamine use can lead to coordination problems, accidents, and dropout from work or school, especially in cases of intensive use. Disruption of public order occurs mainly with use of higher doses or combined use; the number of police incidents is increasing. The risk of crime and international issues is significant: the Netherlands functions as a distribution country, there is entanglement with organised crime, and large-scale international transit and law enforcement challenges occur. Illegal trade and leakage from the legal supply chain are characteristic bottlenecks.

3. Legislation and supervision

The current regulation of ketamine under the Geneesmiddelenwet (Medicines Act) and the Wet Dieren (Animal Health and Welfare Act) has limitations, particularly in addressing illegal trade and organised crime. Supervision is mainly administrative in nature, physical inspections are limited, and there is an imbalance between assigned tasks and available capacity at the Health and Youth Care Inspectorate (IGJ), the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA), the police and customs. Supervision is also vulnerable to fraud and circumvention, and there is no robust system to structurally prevent leakage from the legal supply chain.

4. Policy options and supervision

The Committee has carefully weighed the advantages and disadvantages of possible policy changes—including bringing ketamine under the Opiumwet (Opium Act). On this point there is no consensus within the Committee; therefore no specific recommendation is made. The various considerations and the possible consequences of policy choices are described in detail in the report. The effectiveness of alternatives and the final policy measures should be monitored periodically.

5. Recommendations

The Committee considers an integrated, coherent approach necessary to reduce the risks of ketamine for public health and society. The main recommendations are:

- Structural monitoring and evaluation of trends in ketamine use, health incidents, societal risks and the effectiveness of measures.
- Strengthening prevention and information, with attention to groups with increased vulnerability, combined use and early detection.
- Improving cooperation in healthcare, including between somatic care, addiction care and specialised outpatient clinics.
- Optimising legislation and regulation, including strengthening cooperation between IGJ (Health and Youth Care Inspectorate), NVWA (Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority) and the police, addressing administrative vulnerabilities and including ketamine analogues in policy and supervision.
- Developing or adapting regulations so that it is no longer possible to circumvent the Geneesmiddelenwet (Medicines Act) by mixing active substances with other agents. This will make it easier to determine whether an offence has been committed, including in mixtures that contain, for example, ketamine.
- Reducing the availability of ketamine for recreational use through prioritisation, joint enforcement and sufficient personnel and financial capacity for oversight and investigation.
- Strengthening coordination and direction of the oversight of substances, so that fragmentation of responsibilities is countered and more decisive action can be taken.
- Promoting a joint European approach, in addition to national measures, by advocating a coordinated strategy and cooperation at EU level. This can increase the effectiveness of policy, supervision and enforcement, and prevents national measures from being circumvented via other Member States.

6. Conclusion

The Committee underscores the importance of an integrated and coordinated approach to limit the risks of ketamine use. The proposed recommendations – aimed at monitoring, prevention, care, legislation and regulation, enforcement and coordination – are applicable regardless of the eventual legal status of ketamine. Placement of ketamine under the Opiumwet (Opium Act) is one of the policy options that must be carefully weighed; however, there is no consensus within the Committee on this point. For that reason, no specific recommendation is made. It is up to policymakers to arrive at a well-considered choice based on the risks, bottlenecks and considerations outlined in this report.

Finally, the Committee emphasises the importance of international cooperation. Given the international nature of production, trade and distribution, the Committee advises a joint European approach to ketamine. A coordinated strategy can increase the effectiveness of policy, oversight and enforcement and prevents national measures from being circumvented.

