



Business in Focus



Knives, bladed items and hazardous materials

A guide for businesses supplying bladed articles, acids, corrosive substances, explosives precursors and poisons

This guidance is for England and Wales



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In this guide, the words ‘must’ or ‘must not’ are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word ‘should’ is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

Keeping society safe

All businesses that sell goods and services to the public have a duty to ensure they are not putting their customers and others at risk. For obvious reasons, this is particularly true for businesses that supply potentially dangerous items such as knives and bladed items, and hazardous substances such as corrosives and poisons.

The guidance contained in this text covers the controls brought in by the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (OWA) as well as older legislation that also

covers these products. It has been designed to provide businesses with clear, practical information about the legal controls and their obligations under the law.

It looks at things like labelling, age restrictions and different types of sales - for example, the differences between selling in-store and online, as well as other types of ‘remote’ sales, such as mail order or telephone sales.

While the emphasis of this guidance is on helping your business to get things

right, it is worth remembering that you may be prosecuted if you break the law. This reflects how important it is to make sure dangerous goods do not fall into the wrong hands, for the sake of businesses, consumers and society as a whole.

Part 1 of this text focuses on acids, other corrosive substances and explosives precursors or poisons; part 2 covers the marketing, sale and delivery of knives and other bladed articles / products.



Part 1. Acids and corrosive substances

Selling acids, other corrosive substances and explosives precursors or poisons

Background

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (OWA) responds to the threat posed by the use of corrosive substances as a weapon to inflict serious harm. Whilst this type of crime is not new, the use of corrosives as a weapon is of significant concern given the life-changing injuries that these substances can inflict. The measures provided by the Act strengthen the powers of the Police, Trading Standards and other partners to be able to tackle these crimes. The provisions are designed to restrict access to those products containing the most harmful corrosive substances by prohibiting the sale and delivery of corrosive products to under 18s.

Batteries (in any form) are exempt from the sales and delivery prohibitions in the OWA. The substance or product has to be contained within a battery to be exempt. This means that battery acid itself is not exempt, nor are acid filler bottles.

Alongside the OWA, the Government has encouraged retailers to sign up to [voluntary commitments](#) aimed at restricting access by persons aged under 18 to products containing acid and other corrosive substances.

Although they are sold for legitimate uses, products containing certain chemicals can also be misused for criminal purposes. Certain chemicals can be used in the illicit manufacture of explosives or to cause harm. These

chemicals, known as explosives precursors and poisons, are put into two categories in the Poisons Act 1972: regulated or reportable.

On 1 October 2023, the Control of Explosives Precursors and Poisons Regulations 2023 tightened the restrictions around these products, giving suppliers new responsibilities.

The vigilance of sellers has played a key role in enabling the authorities to detect and disrupt these criminal activities. This includes both proactive steps around controlling the purchasing of these products, as well as reporting losses, thefts or suspicious transactions. The guidance in this document aims to help you prevent serious crimes, as well as fulfil your legal obligations.

A number of corrosives subject to the OWA controls are also explosive precursors and subject to additional controls under the Poisons Act 1972. The OWA lists corrosive products in Schedule 1 to the Act; they are set out later in this guidance.

Selling acids, other corrosive substances and explosives precursors or poisons presents particular challenges. Retailers (both on-premises and remote - for example, online) must have effective systems in place for preventing unlawful sales.

The controls on these products will depend on whether they are restricted, regulated or reportable.

Restricted products

These are products that have an age restriction, meaning they are prohibited from sale to a person under the legal age limit - for example, acids and other corrosives cannot be sold to those under 18. There are also restrictions on where these products can be delivered (when products are sold remotely, deliveries to residential premises or lockers are prohibited - see 'Duty of retailers' below).

Regulated products

Members of the public who want to import, acquire, possess or use these chemicals must hold an explosives precursors and poisons (EPP) licence issued by the Home Office and an associated photographic identity document. An EPP licence is required before regulated substances can be legitimately supplied to a member of the public. Businesses and professional users do not require EPP licences for regulated substances, where the substance is being used as part of their business or profession.

Regulated poisons must only be supplied to the public by, or under the supervision of, a registered pharmacist. Specific [guidance for pharmacists](#) is available on the GOV.UK website.

A member of the public must show their valid EPP licence and associated photo ID document before you can supply them with any regulated chemicals.

Reportable products

There are no restrictions on sales of reportable substances, but there is an obligation to report suspicious transactions or attempts at purchasing (plus loss and theft), whether that is to a business customer or a member of the public. Even if a purchase is lawful, it could still potentially be suspicious and, in that case, there is an obligation under the Act to report it.

If regulated substances are sold at a lower concentration than specified in the Act they then fall into the category of reportable, meaning no EPP licence would be required. However, there is still the obligation to report suspicious transactions or attempts at purchasing (as well as loss and theft), whether this involves a business or a member of the public.

Reports must be made within 24 hours of deeming them suspicious.



Duty of retailers

Under the OWA it is the legal responsibility of sellers to ensure they do not:

- Sell age-restricted corrosive products to people who are under the minimum legal age of 18
- Deliver, or arrange to deliver, corrosive products to residential addresses or to lockers (in the case of remote sales)

Residential premises are defined for the purposes of the OWA as “premises used solely for residential purposes”. This definition has been used to ensure that deliveries of corrosive products can be made to businesses that are run from residential premises.

Remote sales are defined for the purposes of the OWA as being where the seller or the seller’s representative were not in the presence of the buyer. Remote sales therefore includes sales made online, over the telephone or by post.

A locker is defined as “a lockable container to which the package was delivered with a view to its collection by the buyer, or a person acting on behalf of the buyer, in accordance with arrangements made between the seller and the buyer”. Lockers are often positioned in petrol stations or retail outlets and involve a code being sent to the purchaser in order to open it. They do not easily enable age verification to be carried out at the point of collection.

Sellers must also ensure they do not sell:

- Regulated substances (EPPs) above the allowed concentration limits to a member of the public who does not hold a valid Home Office EPP licence (for the specified chemical, amount and use)
- Regulated poisons to a member of the public unless they (the seller) are a registered pharmacist or they are under the supervision of a registered pharmacist

Sellers must:

- Ensure all packages containing a corrosive product are clearly marked* to indicate that they contain a corrosive product and that they must only be delivered into the hands of a person aged 18 or over
- Record the details of any transaction of a regulated substance (EPP) on the back of the purchaser’s EPP licence (which is currently a physical piece of paper designed to have these details added to it)
- When supplying regulated explosives precursors to professional users and other businesses (that is, those who don’t need a licence), take additional steps to verify the legitimacy of the professional user or business

- Ensure that if a product containing a regulated EPP substance above the concentration threshold is supplied to a member of the general public (who will need an EPP licence), it is properly labelled with “Acquisition, possession or use by the general public is restricted”. (For more information, please read the GOV.UK guidance on [labelling requirements for regulated poisons and explosives precursors](#))
- Identify and report (using the [online reporting tool](#)) any suspicious transactions or attempted transactions, losses or theft of regulated or reportable substances or products of concern within 24 hours of when the person forms the belief that the transaction is suspicious / the discovery of the loss or theft

[*It is up to the seller to determine how best to meet this marking requirement - for example, by using a sticker or other label. Sellers could consider the use of symbols as part of the package labelling process. However, further advice should be sought on this, noting the requirements of the GB CLP (chemical classification, labelling and packaging) rules. For more information on GB CLP, please see the ‘What does the supplier have to ensure is on the label?’ section below.]

It is a criminal offence to sell corrosive products to a person under 18.

It is a criminal offence to deliver a corrosive product, or arrange for its delivery, to a residential address or a locker.

Further detail on labelling and on the OWA sales and delivery prohibitions can be found in the [Home Office statutory guidance on the OWA](#), which is available on the GOV.UK website.

See also the GOV.UK guidance for retailers on [licensed transactions for poisons and explosives precursors](#).

The Protect UK website has specific information on [selling chemicals responsibly](#), including free downloadable posters, as well as information on [securing hazardous materials to help prevent terrorism](#).



Age-restricted corrosive products under the OWA

Name of substance and Chemical Abstracts Service Registry Number (CAS RN)	Concentration limit (weight in weight)	May be present in
Ammonium hydroxide (CAS RN 1336-21-6)	10%	Household cleaners, disinfectants, stain treaters
Formic acid (CAS RN 64-18-6)	10%	Wart removers, household descalers, food preservatives
Hydrochloric acid (CAS RN 7647-01-0) AKA spirits of salt	10%	Household cleaners (toilet bowl, bathroom tile and other porcelain cleaners), brick and patio cleaners, limescale removers Note: this is also a regulated EPP at 10% or more
Hydrofluoric acid (CAS RN 7664-39-3)	0%	Aluminium wheel cleaners, wire cleaners, rust removers
Nitric acid (CAS RN 7697-37-2)	3%	Drain cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners, descalers Note: this is also a regulated EPP at 3% or more
Phosphoric acid (CAS RN 7664-38-2)	70%	Bath cleaners, tile cleaners, sink cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners, rust removers Note: this is also a regulated EPP at 30% or more
Sodium hydroxide (CAS RN 1310-73-2) AKA caustic soda	12%	Drain cleaners, oven cleaners, paint strippers
Sodium hypochlorite (CAS RN 7681-52-9)	10%	Drain cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners, bleach (low concentration), descalers
Sulfuric acid (CAS RN 7664-93-9)	15%	Drain cleaners, brick cleaners, car wheel cleaners, acid for car batteries (sold as such) Note: this is also a regulated EPP at 15% or more

Sales of acid: voluntary commitments for retailers

The [voluntary commitment for retailers scheme](#) engages with retailers to agree:

- To comply with the Poisons Act 1972 and promote awareness to staff of what this means. This

applies to the sale of products, including those containing levels of acid and other corrosive substances that are either regulated or reportable under the Poisons Act 1972

- Not to sell products that contain potentially harmful levels of acid or corrosive substances to people under the age of 18. Where appropriate, this will include applying Challenge 21 / 25 policies

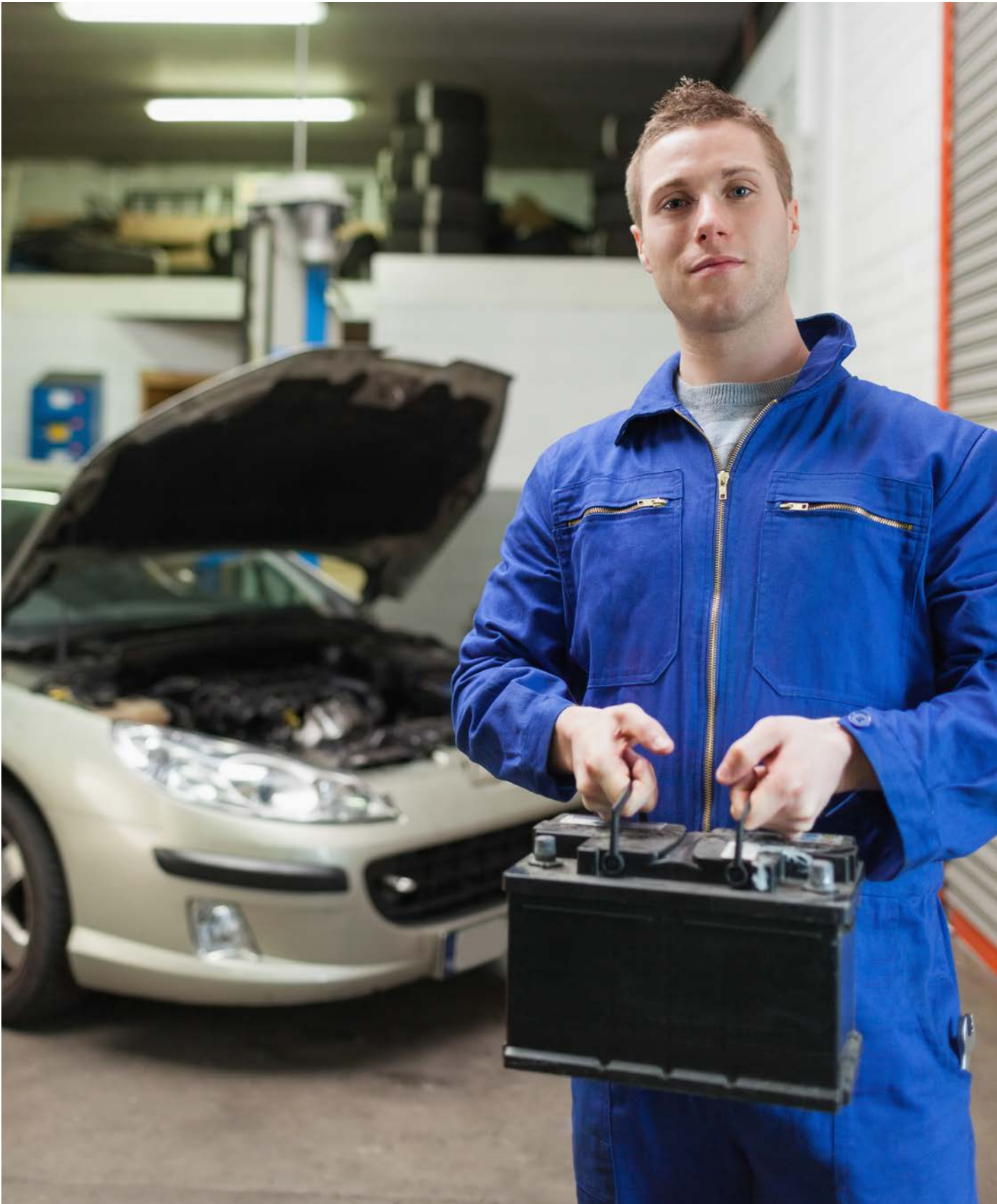
when asking for age identification, and supporting staff with till alerts, supervision and the inclusion of the products in age-restricted sales training

- That equivalent age-restriction measures are applied to products sold remotely

Corrosive substances of concern covered by the voluntary commitments

Chemical	Concentration limit (weight in weight)	May be present in
Sulfuric acid	Any	Drain cleaners / unblockers, brick cleaners, car batteries
Sodium hydroxide AKA caustic soda	12% and over	Drain cleaners / unblockers, paint strippers
Hydrochloric acid AKA spirits of salt	10% and over	Brick and patio cleaners, limescale removers
Ammonium hydroxide	10% and over	Cleaning products
Sodium hypochlorite	10% and over	Cleaning products

The scheme effectively mirrors the subsequent legal age restrictions on these products brought in by the OWA, but also extends this to any concentration of sulfuric acid, and not just products above the 15% weight in weight (w/w) concentration specified in the OWA.



Regulated explosives precursors that require a Home Office EPP licence to be sold to members of the public

Chemical	Concentration limit (weight in weight)	May be present in
Ammonium nitrate	16%	Fertilisers, fireworks, herbicides and insecticides
Hexamine	Any	Solid camping fuel, model steam engine solid fuel
Hydrochloric acid	10%	Household cleaners (toilet bowl, bathroom tile and other porcelain cleaners), brick and patio cleaners, limescale removers
Hydrogen peroxide	12%	Bleach, hair bleach, disinfectants, cleaning agents
Nitromethane	30%	Fuel for model engines
Nitric acid	3%	Etching agent, metal treatment, pH adjuster
Phosphoric acid	30%	Bath, tile, sink and toilet bowl cleaners, rust removers
Potassium chlorate, potassium perchlorate, sodium chlorate, sodium perchlorate	40%	Pyrotechnic kits, aquatic oxygenating tablets
Sulfuric acid	15%	Drain cleaner, brick cleaner, car wheel cleaner, acid for car batteries

Note: sulfuric acid at 15% or more, hydrochloric acid at 10% or more and phosphoric acid at 70% or more are also covered by the OWA age restriction.

The Poisons Act requires a supplier to:

- Not supply a regulated substance, above the concentration threshold, to a member of the public, unless they hold a valid licence and associated photographic ID
- Report any relevant transaction that they make, or propose to make, if they have reasonable grounds for believing the transaction to be suspicious:
 - If it is a regulated or reportable explosives precursor, consider if it is intended for the illicit manufacture of explosives
 - If it is a regulated or reportable poison, consider if it is intended for any illicit use
- Always take appropriate steps to assess if there are reasonable grounds for suspicion
- Report all significant losses or thefts of regulated or reportable substances

Any member of the general public who is not using the regulated chemicals as part of their trade, business or profession will need to have an EPP licence to acquire, possess or use the regulated chemicals.

If someone asks to purchase a regulated explosives precursor, you must:

- Check whether the purchase is being made by a member of the public (in which case they will need an EPP licence) or is a business transaction (and therefore exempt from the licensing requirement, but checks are still required to verify the legitimacy of the professional user or business)
- Remember that corrosives listed in the OWA, such as sulfuric acid, are also age-restricted and any purchaser, even if a trade professional or sole trader, must still be 18 or over to buy them
- Ask to see a prospective purchaser’s EPP licence and associated photographic ID (if the purchaser is a member of the public)
- Check that the licence permits them to buy the product type, quantity and concentration involved and that the purchase is for the specified use
- Fill out the back of the licence
- Use the [online reporting tool](#) to report any suspicious transactions or attempted transactions within 24 hours

Since 1 October 2023, businesses supplying regulated explosives precursors to professional users and other businesses (that is, those who don’t need an EPP licence) have had to take additional steps to verify the legitimacy of the professional user or business.

The person making the sale must obtain the following from the business customer:

- The business customer’s name and address. If the business customer is not an individual, the name of an individual who is authorised on behalf of the business customer should be recorded
- A form of photographic identification of the business customer or, if the business customer is not an individual, of the individual making the purchase
- A statement of the nature of the business customer’s trade, business or profession, or of the public function that the business customer performs
- The business customer’s VAT registration number, if the business customer has such a number

This information does not need to be physically presented in person. For example, a photo of a driving licence attached to an email would be acceptable as a form of identification.

This information must be recorded and retained for 18 months, and available for inspection.

In all cases, the supplier should assess whether the intended use is reasonably consistent with the trade, business or profession. If in doubt, the sale must be refused and reported as a suspicious transaction within 24 hours.

Businesses and professional users should be verified every time a new purchase is made. Where regulated substances are being supplied frequently or on a routine basis to the same professional user or business, verification should occur every 18 months or whenever there is a change or deviation from normal purchasing patterns.

For the purposes of this requirement, examples of photographic identification can include a passport, driving licence, trade identification card and business ID card (this list is not exhaustive).

For advice on verifying a business customer, you can either:

- Contact epp@homeoffice.pnn.Police.uk or
- Locate your local [Police counter-terrorism security adviser](#) and complete the contact request form



Reportable products

A reportable product is one that contains any of the substances listed in the table below. See ‘[Supplying explosives precursors and poisons](#)’ on the GOV.UK website for more detailed information and the full list of reportable poisons.

You are legally obliged to use the [online reporting tool](#) to report suspicious transactions, significant losses and thefts of products containing the substances in the following table.

Suspicious transactions, losses and thefts must be reported, using the [online reporting tool](#) or the anti-terror hotline 0800 789 321.

To be a reportable product, a listed chemical should generally be present, either:

- On its own or the main ingredient or
- In a simple mixture, typically with fewer than five ingredients

Products containing less than 1% of any of the above chemicals, or fertilisers that are not labelled for nitrogen (N) content, are in general of no concern.

Reportable products

Substance	Typical products
Any concentration of regulated explosives precursors	Contact lens solution*
Acetone	Nail varnish remover, household solvent
Aluminium powders	Pyrotechnic supplies, paint supplies
Calcium nitrate	Fertiliser
Calcium ammonium nitrate	Fertiliser
Magnesium nitrate hexahydrate	Fertiliser, hair conditioning, food preservative
Magnesium powders	Pyrotechnic supplies, paint supplies
Potassium nitrate	Food preservative, fertiliser, pyrotechnics
Sodium nitrate	Fertiliser
Sulfur (sometimes spelt Sulphur)	Generally sold as a pure substance
Products marked with a skull and cross bones warning label	Pest control, cleaning products

[*Hydrogen peroxide in soft contact lens solution at a concentration under 12% is not reportable, but all suspicious transactions of any strength should be reported.]

How to identify products of concern

The following steps will help you sell responsibly and meet your legal requirements.

1. Check whether your products contain any of the above listed chemicals or are labelled with the ‘skull and crossbones’ pictogram. The ingredients of a product can normally be found on the label, in the safety data sheet or in other product information. If you cannot find this information, contact your supplier.
2. Identify the products of concern. Products of concern are those in which a listed chemical is present, either:
 - On its own or the main ingredient or
 - In a simple mixture, typically with fewer than five ingredients
3. Products containing less than 1% of any of the listed chemicals, or fertilisers that are not labelled for nitrogen (N) content, are in general of no concern.
4. Inform your staff of the products of concern, what to look out for and how to report them.
5. If possible, store the products so that they can be easily monitored by your staff - for example, close to or behind the sales counter or, if feasible, in a locked storeroom.

6. Periodically carry out stock checks to monitor stock movement and any potential losses / thefts.

7. Periodically review your stocked products to ensure the information remains up to date.

Complying with the law

1. Identify which of your products contain regulated or reportable substances.
2. Implement a system that reminds sales staff / delivery staff or agents that a product requires a licence or extra checks, or is subject to suspicious transaction reporting.
3. Be clear with staff about suspicious behaviour (see below).
4. Make sure your staff know about the record of suspicious transactions (or other internal company record procedures) and how to report to the Home Office / Police if needed.
5. Ensure the above points are in your training manual.
6. Remind your staff about the procedures for refusing a sale.

How to recognise suspicious transactions

A suspicious transaction is any transaction or attempted transaction where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the product is intended for malicious purposes. Whether or not behaviour is suspicious has to be judged on a case-by-case basis. Indicators of suspicious behaviour may include when a customer:

- Appears nervous or avoids communication
- Attempts to purchase an unusual amount of a product or unusual combinations of products
- Is not familiar with the regular use(s) of the product(s), nor with the handling instructions
- Is not willing to share what they plan to use the product(s) for
- Refuses alternative products or products with a lower (but for the proposed use sufficient) concentration
- Insists on paying cash, especially large amounts
- Is unwilling to provide identity or home address details if requested
- Requests packaging or delivery methods that deviate from what would be ordinary, advised or expected

Regulated poisons

Regulated poisons may be sold to a member of the public only by, or under the supervision of, a registered pharmacist. If you are not a registered pharmacist, or under the supervision of one, you must refuse the sale of any regulated poison you may stock.



Regulated poisons

Substance	Concentration limit (weight in weight)
Aluminium phosphide	Any
Aluminium sulfide	Any
Arsenic and its compounds	Any
Barium and its salts (other than barium sulphate, barium carbonate and barium silicofluoride)	Any
Bromomethane	Any
Calcium phosphide	Any
Calcium sulfide	Any
Chloropicrin	Any
Fluoroacetic acid, its salts and fluoroacetamide	Any
Hydrogen cyanide and metal cyanides (other than ferrocyanides and ferricyanides)	Any
Lead acetates and compounds of lead with acids from fixed oils	Any

Regulated poisons

Substance	Concentration limit (weight in weight)
Magnesium phosphide	Any
Magnesium sulfide	Any
Mercury and its compounds	Any
Oxalic acid	10% w/w
Phenols (phenol; phenolic isomers of the following: cresols, xlenols, monoethylphenols); compounds of phenols with a metal	60% w/w of phenols or, for compounds of phenols with a metal, the equivalent of 60% w/w of phenols
Phosphorus yellow	Any
Sodium sulfide	Any
Strychnine and its salts and its quaternary compounds	Any
Thallium and its salts	Any
Zinc phosphide	Any
2,4-dinitrophenol and compounds, including sodium dinitrophenolate	Any

A full [list of all regulated and reportable substances](#) is available on the GOV.UK website.

The GOV.UK website information should be regularly checked for any changes to the substance lists.

What does the supplier have to ensure is on the label?

Products containing substances above the concentration listed must be labelled with the following text:

Acquisition, possession or use by the general public is restricted

This is in accordance with the Poisons Act 1972.

It is the responsibility of the supplier that intends to make available restricted precursors to the general public to ensure that the restriction is clearly indicated on the packaging. This can be by affixing the appropriate label or by verifying that such a label is affixed.

One simple way to implement this requirement may be through supply chain collaboration. Commercial contracts between suppliers and retailers could be used to agree that relevant information on the presence and concentration of regulated substances is shared between suppliers and retailers.

The economic operator that packages the product prior to the product’s entry into the market for the general public is best placed to affix the required label. If you supply a regulated poison or explosives precursor over the specified

concentrations listed to a member of the public without this label, you will commit a criminal offence.

Most regulated products that require this labelling will also need to be labelled according to Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures (known as ‘CLP’) due to their inherent hazardous properties.

CLP came into force on 20 January 2009 in all European Union (EU) Member States, including the UK. The EU CLP Regulation adopts the United Nations’ Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) across all EU countries, including the UK when the UK was an EU Member State.

Post-Brexit, the EU CLP Regulation is retained in GB law and is known as GB CLP. These arrangements mean that Great Britain continues to adopt the GHS, independently of the EU.

Article 32(6) of GB CLP states that:

“Label elements resulting from the requirements provided for in other assimilated law shall be placed in the section for supplemental information on the label referred to in Article 25.”

This means that, for products that fall within the scope of GB CLP, the labelling required must be placed in the section for supplemental information within the CLP label.

Before you order stock through your supply chain, check that it is properly labelled. If it is not, then you are advised not to purchase it to avoid any subsequent supply labelling offences. Take the labelling issue up with the manufacturer / importer / wholesaler. Source alternative, correctly labelled products.

More [information on GB CLP](#) can be found on the Health and Safety Executive website.

Complying with the law when selling these products

Selling in-store

Before handing over the substance:

- Check the person’s age using a Challenge 21 / 25 approach if the product is a corrosive and covered by the legal age restrictions in the OWA or under the voluntary commitments for retailers scheme
- If the product is a regulated poison, ensure that the sale is by, or under the supervision of, a registered pharmacist. Record the transaction as required

If the product is a regulated substance and requires an EPP licence when purchased by a member of the public:

- Check that the photographic ID matches the person and that the photographic ID reference matches the ID reference on the licence’s front page
- Check that the product being purchased is allowed as part of the licence conditions. These will specify:
 - Substance
 - Concentration / intended use
 - Quantity
- Record the transaction details in the table on the back of the licence

Depending on your company’s circumstances, you could, before the transaction for a regulated substance is completed, ask the customer to provide a scanned copy of their licence. If you require customers to register for a customer account, you could allow them to upload a scanned copy of their licence to their account record.

Selling remotely and providing delivery

The law does not prohibit online or other forms or remote sales of regulated substances to members of the public. However, you must remember that it is a criminal offence to deliver corrosive substances to a residential address or a locker.

Please see the ‘Supply chain notification and training’ section for more information as to the new obligations if you are making online sales to business customers.

Explosives, corrosives and poisons are Royal Mail-prohibited items and must not be sent through the post.

Licensed poisons can only be supplied to the public by a pharmacy business. Remote sale systems must ensure the sale is by, or under the supervision of, a registered pharmacist.

For remote sales, retailers must also comply with the requirements to:

- Not supply regulated substances above the concentration threshold to members of the public, unless they hold an EPP licence
- Verify that the member of the public holds a valid licence
- Record the details of any transaction on the back of the licence
- Ensure any product containing a regulated substance above the concentration threshold that is supplied to a member of the public is labelled with ‘Acquisition, possession or use by the general public is restricted’
- Identify and report any suspicious transactions

You must ensure that your remote sales system has robust age verification and ID / licence checks.

Online age-verification software is available that makes use of various sources of information in order to verify both age and identity during the ordering process. These checks include using the electoral register and / or credit reference agencies. There are also businesses that offer online access to electoral register information, which could be used to verify a purchaser’s age.

If the product is regulated and requires an EPP licence, the system must be capable of checking that the:

- Photographic ID matches the person
- Photographic ID reference matches the ID reference on the front page of the licence
- Product being purchased is allowed as part of the licence conditions. These will specify:
 - Substance
 - Concentration / intended use
 - Quantity

Your delivery staff / provider will then need to physically check these same requirements. You will need to provide the delivery agent with the order amount and detail to allow these checks to be done.

Remember, even if the purchaser has a valid EPP licence, you must not deliver corrosive substances listed in the OWA to a residential address or a locker.

Your delivery staff / provider must record that these checks and requirements have all been complied with and provide this evidence to you after delivery. You should retain this evidence; no specific retention period is specified, but you should consider retaining this information for at least three years, in accordance with any data protection policies your business may have.

Your system must also include a process to identify whether the transaction is suspicious in some way or if there may be reasonable grounds to suspect that the product is intended for malicious use. For example, there may have been multiple purchases of the same chemical over a short period that cannot be easily explained, or the customer is requesting unusual amounts for the stated purpose. In such cases you must report this using the [online reporting tool](#) or the anti-terror hotline 0800 789 321.

See ‘[Online sales of age-restricted products](#)’ for more information regarding online sales.

Collect in-store

For some retailers that also have a high street presence, purchasers could view and reserve products remotely and then collect in-store, where age verification and licence checks could be carried out by members of staff, as for a normal face-to-face transaction.

See ‘[Underage sales](#)’ for more information on effective age-verification procedures.

Supply chain notification and training

Since 1 October 2023, businesses supplying regulated and reportable substances to other businesses have been required to inform them that the products they are purchasing are regulated or reportable under the Poisons Act 1972.

To comply with these measures, it is understood that different methods will need to be employed dependent on the specific environment of the supplier and customer base. Businesses should ensure they have a process in place that provides those in the supply chain with an awareness of their obligations under the Poisons Act when that product is sold on.

Consideration should be given to implementing one of the following methods of notification:

- Notification flag when making an order
- Separate email notification when a purchase is made
- Providing notices on shipping information (invoices)
- Providing a separate information note with deliveries

This is not a prescriptive list, and businesses should utilise methods of notification that will work for their business within the environment in which they operate.

Online marketplaces have new obligations to take all reasonably practicable measures to provide information to any supplier that uses the online marketplace to sell regulated or reportable substances about their obligations, and to identify and report any suspicious transactions.

Businesses supplying any substances to professional users or members of the public must also ensure and be able to demonstrate that its staff are aware which of its products contain listed substances and are instructed on obligations and the potential offences that apply.

Enforcement

Non-compliance with the law is a criminal offence. The Police are responsible for enforcing the regime for explosives precursors and poisons. The General Pharmaceutical Council continue to have a role in inspecting pharmacies and associated pharmacy premises. Trading Standards Officers enforce the laws on age-restricted corrosive products and their supply, as well as product labelling.

Part 2. Knives, bladed articles and bladed products

The marketing, sale and delivery of knives, bladed articles and bladed products

Background

Knife and offensive weapon offending has a devastating effect on individuals, families and communities. The unlawful provision and possession of weapons encourages violence and can cause serious injury and death, in addition to facilitating other criminal offences.

Controls on the sale of knives and offensive weapons have been in place for decades, including age restrictions. However, not all knife and offensive weapon offending is committed by young people. The carrying, without a good reason, of an offensive weapon, a knife, or a bladed / pointed article by anyone is a serious offence. Following rises in knife crime and concerns about the possession and use of prohibited offensive weapons, the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (OWA) brought in further restrictions on knives and ‘bladed products’ and controls on their supply and delivery.

The OWA creates an important distinction between ‘bladed articles’ and ‘bladed products’. Bladed products are a specific type of bladed article, and they have extra restrictions on sale and delivery. This will be looked at in detail below.

The Government has introduced a [voluntary retailers’ agreement](#); Trading Standards and the Police encourage retailers to sign up to the agreement, which aims to restrict access by persons aged under 18 to these products. There

is also a [knife retailer toolkit](#), which can be found on the National Business Crime Centre website.

The guidance in this document aims to help you prevent serious crimes, as well as fulfil your legal obligations.

Selling knives and bladed articles presents particular issues for retailers (both for on-premises sales and those made remotely - online, for example) and delivery agents. They must all have effective systems in place for identifying products of concern and preventing unlawful sales or deliveries.

These products are covered by a number of controls, including:

- Age restrictions, meaning they are prohibited from sale to a person under the age of 18
- Restrictions on where these products can be delivered
- Prohibitions of certain types of knives and bladed articles
- Prohibitions on the marketing of knives as combat weapons or the use of knives as a weapon, and on marketing material promoting the use of the articles in violence

Alongside the controls on the sale of knives and bladed articles, you should ensure that these items are displayed and packaged securely as appropriate to minimise risk. This will include taking practical and proportionate

steps to restrict accessibility and avoid immediate use, to reduce the possibility of injury and to prevent theft.

The following precautions are recommended:

- Consider removing knives from display or keep them away from public access in a safe and secure position
- Ask your supplier / manufacturer if they provide dummy displays, dummy packaging, or similar for in-store use
- If you are going to display knives and bladed items, do so by displaying them all in one place in a way that ensures they can be kept under supervision and cannot easily be stolen - for instance, by using approaches that require intervention from a member of staff in order to release the knife from secure display, or positioning them in secure locations within the store; enhanced stock checks could also be put in place
- These arrangements should also include the display of kitchen knife blocks containing multiple knives in a box

Age-restricted bladed articles

It is an offence to sell the following bladed articles to a person under 18:

- Knife
- Knife blade
- Razor blade
- Axe
- Any other article that has a blade or is sharply pointed, and is made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person

The Criminal Justice Act 1988 (CJA) does not define the terms ‘knife’ etc and therefore the words carry their normal meaning. The general principle is that items that can commonly be described as ‘knives’, for example, are to be considered as such. Retailers are expected to act responsibly and to consider carefully whether an item could commonly be defined as a knife.

This applies to any article that is, or has, a blade. This can include things that you may not initially think of as a knife - for example, carpentry adzes, gardening tools, hooks and slashers, paint scrapers and multi-tools (tools that contain a knife or blade alongside other devices such as a screwdriver, can opener, etc).

The only exceptions in law to the bladed or sharply pointed age-restriction provisions are:

- A folding pocket knife, and only if the blade does not exceed three inches (7.62 cm). Typically this would include Swiss army-style knives. ‘Folding pocket knife’ means immediately foldable, simply by pressing it into place. If the knife has any mechanism to lock the blade, the knife is not a folding pocket knife and not exempted
- Razor blades permanently enclosed in a cartridge or housing where less than 2 mm of any blade is exposed beyond the plane that intersects the highest point of the surfaces preceding and following such blades - for example, what are referred to as ‘safety’ razors

Whilst the courts are the final arbiter, the following lists contain items that are likely to fall within the meaning of the 1988 Act prohibition on the sale to under 18s, and those that do not.

Items likely to be age-restricted:

- Any kitchen knife regardless of size or design
- Cutlery knives
- Bread knives
- Knives that can be used for the purpose of hobbies and trades, regardless of whether they are marketed as knives - for example, Stanley knives and snap-off cutters

- Cut-throat razors
- Gardening and farming tools or any other trade tool that could commonly be described as a knife
- Butcher knives, including meat cleavers

The following items are not age-restricted:

- Skewers
- Screwdrivers
- Scissors
- Pruning saws
- Plasterboard saws
- Peelers

The objective of the legislation is to address public concern about knife crime and the risk that dangerous knives and blades fall into the hands of persons under 18.

For the purposes of sections 139 and 139A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, a number of important decisions have been made in court cases:

- A butterknife, with no cutting edge and no point, is a bladed article (Booker v DPP [2005] 169J.P. 368, DG)
- A screwdriver is not a bladed article (R v Davis [1998] Crim L.R. 564 CA)

- A ‘lock knife’ does not come into the category of ‘folding pocket knife’ because it is not immediately foldable at all times (R v Deegan [1998] 2 Cr. App. R. 121 CA)
- A folding ‘cut throat’ razor that is not capable of being locked in the open position and has a blade less than three inches long is not a folding pocket knife (R v D [2019] ECWA (Crim) 45)

If sold remotely, sellers must not deliver any age-restricted bladed article, or arrange for it to be delivered, to a locker. This is because there is no means of verifying age at the point of collection.

In addition to these controls, if these items also fall within the OWA definition of ‘bladed product’ (see below) then they must not be delivered to residential premises unless certain conditions are met (if sold remotely).

Bladed products

The term ‘bladed product’ is a term that was introduced in the OWA and is intended to cover a subset of bladed articles. It means an article with a blade that is capable of causing a serious injury to a person which involves cutting that person’s skin.

When sold remotely (online, for example), bladed products must not be delivered to residential premises unless certain conditions are met; these are covered in the ‘Delivery of bladed products to residential premises’ section below.

Bladed products are a subset of the wider range of bladed articles to which section 141A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 applies (in other words, any article with a blade or sharp point). Whilst the courts are the final arbiter of whether an article is a bladed product or not, the items in the list below are **unlikely** to be considered bladed products:

- Cutlery knives (other than sharply pointed steak knives)
- Utility knives with small cutting blades
- Snap-off cutters
- Pizza cutters
- Small cheese knives

This is because the objective is to reduce access to dangerous knives and blades and their use in violent crime. The types of bladed articles listed above are unlikely to fall within the definition of a bladed product, and can be delivered to residential premises providing the seller follows the conditions set out in the OWA for bladed articles, namely that the:

- Seller has a system in place to verify the age of the purchaser and that they are not under 18 and that the system is likely to prevent purchases by under 18s
- Package, when dispatched by the seller, is clearly marked that it both contains a bladed article and can only be delivered and handed over to a person aged 18 or over
- Seller has taken all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to ensure that when the package is delivered, it is handed over to a person aged 18 or over. This applies whether the seller delivers the package themselves or through a third party

If sold remotely, sellers must not deliver any bladed product, or arrange for it to be delivered, to a locker. Again, this is because there is no means of verifying age at the point of collection.

Age verification

Whether you sell in-store or remotely, you must ensure that your sales system has robust age-verification and ID checks.

The legislation does not specify what type of age-verification system is required; it is up to sellers to make a decision on whether their system meets the requirement that it is “likely to prevent” persons under 18 from buying a bladed article.

If you already have existing Challenge 21 / 25 policies to ensure that anyone who appears to be below the age of 18 provides acceptable identification before purchasing an age-restricted product, these can be extended to cover the sale of articles with a point or blade. Although the OWA does not specify, acceptable ID is:

- A valid passport
- Photocard driving licence (UK, EU or other country)
- A proof of age card such as the PASS card from the national Proof of Age Standards Scheme
- Other valid forms of identification, including (for England and Wales) electronic age verification

You do not have to accept all of the above forms of identification, and it may be best to exclude any type of document that your staff are not familiar with.

You can also verify someone’s age visually if they are clearly over the age of 21 / 25 - for example, if they look middle aged.

Electronic and digital age verification

Online age-verification software is available that makes use of various sources of information in order to verify both age and identity during the ordering process.

These checks include using the electoral register and/or credit reference agencies. There are also businesses that offer online access to electoral register information, which could be used to verify a purchaser’s age.

Technology-based systems may be right for some retailers but not all, and both retailers and customers may want a range of different options to be available. It is for businesses to decide what system works best for them.

Collection points

For some retailers that also have a high street presence, purchasers could view and reserve products online and then collect in-store, where age-verification checks could be carried out by members of staff. This applies whether they are the actual purchaser or someone collecting the products on the purchaser’s behalf.

Delivery

If the item is being delivered, the age-verification system must, in addition to the above, be capable of ensuring that the item is:

- Clearly and properly labelled on its packaging
- Only given to an age-verified person
- Not left unattended
- Not delivered to a residential address without the necessary checks (these are covered in more detail in the ‘Delivery of bladed products to residential premises’ section below)
- Not delivered to a locker

Your delivery staff / provider must record that these checks and requirements have all been complied with and provide this evidence to you after delivery. You should retain this evidence (as stated in part 1 of this guidance, retention for at least three years is recommended).

Where a delivery company may use a local shop run by a third party as a collection point for customers to pick up a parcel, rather than - for example - having it delivered to their home address, then age verification must still occur upon collection by the purchaser or someone collecting on their behalf; this is to prevent the offence of delivery to a person under 18 being committed.

It will be for the delivery company and the seller to ensure that their contractual arrangements are sufficiently robust to ensure effective checks are done by any third party operating such shops in these circumstances. They should obtain (and retain) evidence of this, or it will be difficult for them to show that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to prevent age-restricted items being delivered to a person under 18. See the section ‘Using delivery companies / couriers’ below for more detailed information regarding defences available to sellers and delivery companies.

See ‘[Online sales of age-restricted products](#)’ for more information regarding online sales.

See ‘[Underage sales](#)’ for more information on effective age-verification procedures.

Labelling

All packages must be clearly marked to indicate that they contain a bladed article and must only be delivered into the hands of a person aged 18 or over. The law does not specify the type of labelling or the size or style. However, it must be clear and visible, so you should consider the size and colour of the warning - for example, taking into account the size and nature of the packaging. If the package is particularly small it may be necessary to send it in a manner that ensures any label can be read easily, such as by putting it inside a larger outer envelope or wrap that carries the necessary information.

The requirement may be met, for example, by a clear and visible sticker.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) recommend the use of Arial font with point 12 as a minimum size. Contrast dark type against a light background as a general rule. Black type on a white or yellow background gives a good contrast. Avoid using colour alone to convey information because some people may be unable to distinguish between the colours. Some people have difficulty distinguishing between red and green, in particular; others find light text on a dark background difficult to read.

Example labelling:

This package contains a bladed article and must only be delivered into the hands of a person aged 18 or over

The Act is clear that the package itself must be clearly labelled, so it is unlikely that the electronic labels used on handheld signature devices often used by delivery companies and couriers would satisfy this requirement. However, these technologies would improve the visibility of the warning and could be used in addition to the label.

Clear and visible labelling is important for retail staff, delivery staff and couriers so that they are fully aware that the package contains a bladed article and must not be handed over to someone under 18.

Delivery of bladed products to residential premises

The OWA makes it an offence for the seller to deliver, or arrange the delivery of, bladed products to residential premises, unless certain conditions are met that would allow the seller to prove that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to prevent the item from being delivered to a person under 18. This would apply equally to sellers that have their own delivery arm and to those that arrange delivery to a residential address by a separate delivery company.

Sellers that make their own deliveries have defences available to them. Where a seller is delivering the bladed product themselves, they will need to ensure that they have internal procedures in place to ensure that when delivered, the bladed product would not be handed to a person under 18. They also need to prove they have taken all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to ensure that this occurred. Steps that sellers would need to take are likely to include those for the sale of bladed articles, such as having an adequate age-verification system in place, labelled packaging and taking measures to ensure that the package is only handed over to someone aged 18 or over.

The effect of this is that where a seller has such procedures and has taken all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence, they can deliver bladed products to residential premises.

For example, you may sell online and have specific online age-verification processes in place, prior to the sale being processed, to confirm that the purchaser is 18 or over. Where these checks are carried out and you allow the sale to occur, there must be further checks by your delivery arm to ensure that the item is properly labelled and only delivered to that person (or another person whose age is verified at point of delivery). Where no such arrangements are in place, the item will have to be collected in person at a collection point where you can carry out proper age-verification checks.

The Act defines ‘residential premises’ as premises used solely for residential purposes. This means that if a premises is used for both business and residential purposes (for instance, if a person is running a business from their home, such as a decorator, a carpenter or a farmer), it is possible to deliver bladed products to the address.

Using delivery companies / couriers

Where a seller is arranging delivery of the product by a delivery company, the seller has a defence where they

can demonstrate that they have arrangements in place with the delivery company, which require it to have arrangements in place to ensure that the bladed product would not be handed to a person under 18. The seller also needs to be able to show that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to ensure this occurred.

This might include having contractual arrangements in place with a delivery company requiring age verification at the point of delivery and monitoring this to ensure that it is effective at preventing items reaching under 18s. If you have a pre-existing contractual arrangement with a third-party delivery company to deliver knives and other bladed articles / products, then you should ensure this is reviewed. The courier / delivery agent must be required to carry out checks upon delivery to ensure that these items are only delivered to a person who is at least 18.

These checks are in addition to the seller’s checks to ensure bladed products are not going to a person under 18 at a residential address.

Sellers who contract with third-party delivery companies to deliver knives and other bladed products on their behalf must explicitly make it clear in their contractual arrangement that these items are being delivered. This will enable the delivery company to ensure that effective age check controls are in place within their delivery

processes to avoid committing an offence. There are usually contractual terms and conditions with delivery companies that require such disclosure. For example, Royal Mail, Parcelforce and the UPS age-verification service have such terms.

Sellers who sell to residential addresses must not use delivery companies that do not provide an age-verification service, or whose terms and conditions expressly forbid the carriage of knives - for example, DPD or Evri. If age verification is not available to ensure that a bladed product would not be handed over to a person under 18, it will be difficult for sellers to show that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to prevent this occurring.

The seller must ensure that parcels containing these items are clearly labelled as required when they are dispatched; it is not the responsibility of the delivery company to do so. If the seller does not tell the delivery company that they are delivering a bladed product and label it as such, the seller would commit an offence if the package is delivered to someone under 18.

Where sellers do not make such explicit declarations and contractual arrangements with a delivery company that provides an age-verification service, then they will not be able to rely on that defence if they send bladed products to a residential address. For example, if you just send the item through a mail carrier as a normal parcel, instead of using their age-verified services.

Delivery companies must ensure that they have in place effective training procedures and processes so that these items are only left with a person that their staff have confirmed is 18 or over, and that they keep a record of these checks.

The OWA also makes it an offence for a delivery company to deliver bladed products sold by UK-based sellers to someone under 18 at a residential premises. The delivery company would commit an offence if they do not deliver the bladed product into the hands of a person aged 18 or over.

There is a defence available to delivery companies where they can show that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to prevent the item from being delivered to a person under 18. Sellers and delivery companies will need to decide how they will ensure that packages containing bladed products are not delivered to a person under 18. This may include clear labelling that the package contains an age-restricted product and must only be delivered into the hands of someone aged 18 or over.

Delivery companies may need to ensure that anyone who delivers the package for them is aware of the OWA and the need for age verification to take place. They may want to ensure that they have internal systems in place, which confirm that the package has not been delivered to someone under 18, to reassure both themselves and sellers.

Delivery of bladed articles to persons under 18: overseas sellers

The OWA also makes it an offence for a delivery company that has entered into an arrangement with a seller based outside the UK to deliver a bladed article to a person under 18. If the delivery company has not entered into such arrangements, or they do not know when entering into the arrangement that it covered the delivery of a bladed article, then no offence is committed.

There is a defence available to delivery companies where they can show that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to prevent the item from being delivered to a person under 18.

It is up to overseas sellers and delivery companies how they will ensure that packages containing bladed articles are not delivered to a person under 18. To assist delivery companies, all packages containing a bladed article should be clearly marked (by the overseas seller prior to dispatch) to indicate that they contain an age-restricted product and must only be delivered into the hands of a person aged 18 or over.

Examples of a weak age-verification system

The following are examples that are unlikely to be enough to satisfy the requirements of taking all reasonable precautions and exercising all due diligence:

- Relying on the purchaser confirming they are over the minimum age
- Asking the purchaser simply to provide a date of birth
- Using tick boxes to ask purchasers to confirm they are over the minimum age
- Using a general disclaimer such as: ‘Anyone ordering this product from our website will be deemed to be at least 18’
- Using an ‘accept’ statement for the purchaser to confirm that they have read the terms and conditions and are over the minimum age
- Using e-payment services such as PayPal, Nochex or Worldpay. These services may require a customer to be over 18, but they may not verify a user’s age

- Only accepting payment by credit card. Credit cards are not available to under 18s but certain debit and prepaid cards are. Your payment systems are unlikely to be able to differentiate between the different types of cards, so it is essential that you have additional age verification in place

Young people will seek to challenge conventions and test boundaries. In the case of online sales, young people could potentially evade the stringent proof-of-age checks that are required on the high street unless retailers make positive checks.

See ‘[Online sales of age-restricted products](#)’ for more information regarding online sales.

Banned (prohibited) offensive weapons

In addition to the age restriction on the sale of ‘legal’ knives and bladed articles, there are a large number of banned offensive weapons that it is illegal to manufacture, import, sell or hire, offer for sale or hire, expose or have in your possession for the purpose of sale or hire, or lend or give to anyone irrespective of their age. These are:

- **Batons.** Straight, side-handled or friction-lock truncheons
- **Belt buckle knife.** A buckle that incorporates or conceals a knife
- **Blowpipes (sometimes known as ‘blow guns’).** A hollow tube out of which hard pellets or darts are shot by the use of breath
- **Butterfly knives (also known as ‘balisongs’).** A handle that splits in the middle to reveal a blade
- **Cyclone or spiral knives.** A blade with one or more cutting edges that form a spiral and come to a point
- **Disguised knives.** A blade or sharp point hidden inside something that looks like an everyday object such as a buckle, phone, brush or lipstick
- **Flick knives or gravity knives.** Also known as ‘switchblades’ or ‘automatic knives’. Folding knives where the blade opens automatically, by gravity or by pressing a button or something else on the knife
- **Footclaws.** A bar of metal or other hard material worn on the foot, from which a number of sharp spikes come out
- **Handclaws.** A band of metal or ther hard material worn on the hand, from which sharp spikes come out

- **Hollow kubotan.** A cylinder-shaped container containing a number of sharp spikes
- **Knuckle dusters.** A band of metal or other hard material worn on one or more fingers
- **Kusari or ‘manrikigusari’.** A weight or hand grip attached to a rope, cord, chain or wire
- **Kusari gama.** A sickle attached to a rope, cord, chain or wire
- **Kyoketsu shoge.** A hook-knife attached to a rope, cord, chain or wire
- **Ninja sword.** See below for a full description
- **Push dagger.** A knife where the handle fits within a clenched fist and the blade comes out from between two fingers
- **Shurikens (also known as ‘shaken’, ‘death stars’ or ‘throwing stars’).** A hard non-flexible plate with three or more sharp radiating points, designed to be thrown
- **Stealth knives.** Non-metal knives or spikes that are not made for use at home, for food or as a toy
- **Swords.** A curved blade over 50 cm; there are some exceptions, such as antiques, swords made to traditional methods, or swords made before 1954

- **Swordstick.** A hollow walking stick or cane containing a blade
- **Telescopic truncheons.** A knife that extends automatically, or by pressing a button or spring that is in or attached to the handle
- **Zombie knives.** A knife with a cutting edge, a serrated edge and images or words suggesting it is used for violence
- **Zombie-style knives and machetes.** See below for a full description

More [information about the OWA](#), including a video and images of these weapons, is available on the National Business Crime Centre website.

The Sentencing Council has consulted on amending the sentencing guidelines relating to possession of bladed articles and offensive weapons so that possession of a prohibited weapon is treated more seriously than possession of a non-prohibited weapon. It is expected that the results of this consultation will be published towards the end of 2026.

Zombie-style knives and certain types of machetes

After the 2016 ban of zombie knives, some manufacturers changed their designs to produce zombie-style knives and certain types of machetes, attempting to avoid the ban. This loophole was closed in September 2024, when these types of weapons were also banned.

The types of bladed articles that fall under the ban are those with all of the following:

- A plain cutting edge
- A sharp pointed end
- A blade of over eight inches (20.32 cm) in length (the length of the blade being the straight-line distance from the top of the handle to the tip of the blade)

To fall under the ban, the blade must also have one or more of the following features:

- A serrated cutting edge (other than a serrated cutting edge of up to two inches (5.08 cm) next to the handle)
- More than one hole in the blade
- Spikes
- More than two sharp points in the blade (other than (a) a sharp point where the angle between the edges which create the point is an angle of at least 90° (where there is a curved edge, the angle will be measured by reference to the tangent of the curve); or (b) a sharp point on the cutting edge of the blade near the handle)

In addition, there is:

- A Police power to seize, retain and destroy lawfully held bladed articles in private premises, if the Police are in the property lawfully and have reasonable grounds to suspect that the article will be used in crime
- An increase in the maximum penalty for the offence of importation, manufacture, sale and general supply of prohibited and dangerous weapons and the sale of knives to persons under 18 years old to two years
- An offence of possession of bladed articles with the intention to endanger life or to cause fear of violence

Ninja swords

In August 2025, ninja swords were added to the list of banned weapons. In July 2026, their legal definition changed, as follows.

A ‘ninja sword’ is legally defined as a fixed bladed article that has all of the following:

- A blade whose length is at least 14 inches, but no more than 24 inches (the length of the blade being the straight-line distance from the top of the handle to the tip of the blade)

- A primary straight cutting edge
- A secondary straight cutting edge
- A blunt spine
- Either a tanto style point or a reversed tanto style point

A sword has a tanto style point if:

- The angle between its primary straight cutting edge and its secondary straight cutting edge is greater than 90 degrees and
- The angle between its secondary straight cutting edge and its spine is less than 90 degrees

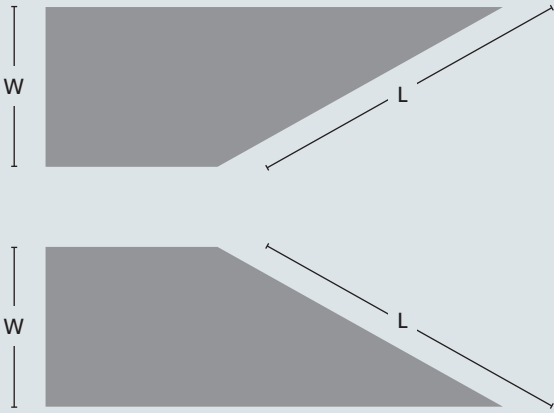
A sword has a reversed tanto style point if:

- The angle between its primary straight cutting edge and its secondary straight cutting edge is less than 90 degrees and
- The angle between its secondary straight cutting edge and its spine is greater than 90 degrees

A primary straight cutting edge is the longest cutting edge of a blade which immediately connects to the handle. A secondary straight cutting edge is a cutting edge:

- That forms an angle with the primary straight cutting edge and the spine and
- That is no more than 105% longer than the width of the blade immediately after the handle

Illustration



W = Width of the blade immediately after the handle
L = Length of secondary cutting edge

Length ≤ width + (105% of the width)

Example:
If the width is 4cm then 105% of the width is 4.2cm.
Therefore L cannot exceed 4cm + 4.2cm = 8.2cm.

The possession, manufacture, sale and supply of such swords is banned.

Knives Act 1997

This piece of legislation makes it an offence to market a knife and also an offence to publish marketing material in relation to a knife in a way that either:

- Indicates or suggests that it is suitable for combat (the term ‘suitable for combat’ means that the knife is suitable for use as a weapon for inflicting injury or causing fear of injury to the person) or
- Is otherwise likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour involving the use of the knife as a weapon

An indication or suggestion that a knife is suitable for combat may be made by a name or description in any of the following ways:

- Applied to the knife
- On the knife or on any packaging in which it is contained
- Included in any advertisement that expressly or by implication relates to the knife

There are exemptions to allow sales of such items for legitimate purposes, such as for use by armed forces, as antiques or as collectors’ pieces.

When considering the sale of knives and bladed articles and the marketing of such, it is therefore essential that you actively review and document your decisions as to:

- The type and nature of each article
 - Why you consider it to be a lawful type and not banned
 - How it is marketed, including what is on the product itself or its packaging
- What marketing material you may use (advertisements, webpage descriptions, etc)

Further guidance on the sale of knives, including restrictions on the marketing of knives, see ‘[Knives, other bladed items and corrosive substances](#)’.

Enforcement

Trading Standards Officers enforce the laws on age-restricted products and their supply.



Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards Services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see ‘[Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties](#)’.

In this update

The legal definition of a ninja sword changed on 16 July 2026.

Last reviewed / updated: July 2026

Key legislation

- [Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959](#)
- [Poisons Act 1972](#)
- [Criminal Justice Act 1988](#)
- [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(Offensive Weapons\) Order 1988](#)
- [Knives Act 1997](#)
- [Control of Poisons and Explosives Precursors Regulations 2015](#)
- [Offensive Weapons Act 2019](#)
- [Control of Poisons and Explosives Precursors Regulations 2023](#)
- [Criminal Justice Act 1988 \(Offensive Weapons\) \(Amendment\) \(England and Wales\) Order 2026](#)

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<https://www.protectuk.Police.uk/advice-and-guidance/awareness/poisons-act-1972-selling-chemicals-responsibly>

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide’s ‘Key legislation’ links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the ‘More Resources’ tab.

