

News Release

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Ecstasy and club drug studies released along with education campaign aimed at assisting overdose victims

More than 200,000 people in Ontario have used ecstasy at least once in their lifetime according to a new study released today by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

“This is the first time we have surveyed ecstasy use among the general population in Ontario,” said Dr. Edward Adlaf, lead author of the study and Research Scientist, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Associate Professor, Department of Public Health, University of Toronto.

Overall, 2.7% of those surveyed reported ecstasy use during their lifetime and 1.8% reported using the drug during the 12 months prior to the CAMH study. These percentages represent about 219,100 and 146,000 Ontario adults, respectively.

The research, based on a telephone survey of 2,406 adults aged 18 and older, also found the following:

- The highest rates of use were found among 18 to 29 years.
- Use was higher among men than women.
- Ecstasy use did not vary significantly by region, education or income.
- The majority of those who used ecstasy at least once in their lives were males aged 18 to 29 years, and employed full-time.

Results of a two-month survey of club drug usage among young people admitted to the emergency departments of the University Health Network (UHN) were also released today.

Dr. Steven Friedman, Attending Physician, Emergency Medicine, University Health Network and Assistant Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, found that emergency department patients who reported use of club drugs frequently combined one drug with another, or consumed club drugs and alcohol within the same period.

Results of Dr. Friedman’s study include the following:

- 10.4 % of study patients surveyed at the UHN emergency department reported using Ecstasy, GHB, or Ketamine within the past 24 hours.
- Polypharmacy (use of more than one drug in past 24 hours) was reported at least 50 % of the time.
- Ecstasy users reported use of another drug (including alcohol) 50 % of the time. GHB users reported use of another drug (including alcohol) 90 % of the time.

-- 78 % of GHB users, 42 % of Ecstasy users, and 46 % of ethanol users arrived by ambulance, compared with 17.5 % of the base population.

A new public education campaign aimed at reducing the harm associated with an overdose was also launched today.

“I was concerned by the number of club drug related medical problems in the emergency department and sensed the need for greater knowledge among many consumers of these drugs,” said Dr. Friedman.

Together with CAMH, Toronto Public Health and associates in the advertising and communications communities, Dr. Friedman developed a public service announcement in a music video format. The PSA is aimed at reducing the harm associated with club drug use, and helping people respond to emergencies related to these drugs.

The PSA will be broadcast across the province and informational postcards will be distributed to Toronto high schools and colleges, and in areas of the city popular with young adults. The postcard provides practical information about an overdose. The cards will also be available provincially through CAMH’s network of community offices.

Peter Coleridge, Vice President, Communications, Education and Community Health at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, said, “Raising awareness is an important step in addressing public health issues, and this campaign is an excellent example of what is possible when community agencies, dedicated professionals and the private sector work together to improve people’s knowledge around an important issue.”

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, a World Health Organization Centre of Excellence and a teaching hospital fully affiliated with the University of Toronto, was established in 1998 through the merger of the Addiction Research Foundation, the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, the Donwood Institute and the Queen Street Mental Health Centre.

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