



National Prescribing Service Limited



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed 1 August 2006

Warning on recreational drug use and overdose

Users of recreational 'party' drugs such as amphetamines, ecstasy and cocaine should be cautious of the risks, according to Dr Dan McCormack and Associate Professor Nicholas Buckley of the Canberra Hospital, writing in the latest issue of *Australian Prescriber*.

Over 9% of Australians over the age of 14 years have tried amphetamine/methamphetamine, 7.5% have tried ecstasy (MDMA) and nearly 5% have tried cocaine, according to the 2004 national drug survey¹ and while the majority of users do not have adverse events that result in going to hospital, there are many side effects that put people at risk.

"Ecstasy and amphetamines can cause serotonin toxicity which is due to the drugs affecting chemicals in the brain. Symptoms include agitation, difficulty sleeping and increased heart rate" said Professor Buckley.

While ecstasy tablets usually contain a single drug, it frequently is not MDMA. Up to 80% of ecstasy tablets sold in Australia contain other drugs that mimic the effects of MDMA. Other chemicals sold as ecstasy include ephedrine and other amphetamines. For example, PMA or 'death' is more toxic than ecstasy and has been associated with a spate of deaths in Australia and Canada.

"Other effects from overdoses include extreme dehydration which is due to a lack of awareness of thirst during physical activity such as dancing. Water overload can also occur due to drinking too much water. This can cause confusion, convulsions and collapse," said Dr McCormack.

The most commonly repeated findings in long-term studies of ecstasy, amphetamine and cocaine use have been problems in the area of learning and memory. There is also evidence of neurotoxicity, but evidence as to whether this is permanent or irreversible is not conclusive.

For the complete article visit the *Australian Prescriber* website www.australianprescriber.com. *Australian Prescriber* is an independent peer-reviewed journal providing critical commentary on therapeutic topics for health professionals. It is published by National Prescribing Service Limited (NPS), an independent, non-profit organisation funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

For further information or expert commentary about this article please contact Anna Karelas at NPS on (02) 8217 8700 (bh) or 0419 618 365 or by email at akarelas@nps.org.au. CP

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey First Results. Canberra: AIHW; 2005. Drug Statistics Series No. 13, AIHW Cat. NO. PHE 57.