

DEWS ALERT

Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB) and Gamma Butyrolactone (GBL)

10 Overdoses Reported in the Past 90 Days in Maryland; Drugs Available on the Internet.

What are GHB/GBL? GHB and its precursor GBL were initially sold in health food stores and used by bodybuilders to stimulate muscle growth and burn fat. GHB is very similar to a natural chemical in the brain called Gamma Amino Butyric Acid (GABA), which slows down motor responses. Once GBL is ingested, it is metabolized into GHB.

Who is using GHB/GBL? GHB/GBL are usually taken in social environments such as parties, clubs, or raves. GHB has also been used as a date rape drug; it is colorless, odorless and can cause the victim to lose consciousness. The Maryland Poison Center has reported 10 overdoses since mid-January 1999 in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Harford, and Wicomico counties. Drug Scan (the DEWS interview project) reports increased use, primarily among white youth (16 to 21) of middle and upper socioeconomic backgrounds.

How are GHB/GBL used? GHB/GBL can be ingested in liquid, powder, or capsule forms and are often taken in combination with other drugs such as alcohol, ethanol, or muscle relaxants.

What are the street names for GHB/GBL? GHB is also known as "G," "Liquid Ecstasy," and "Liquid K." GBL is called "Blue Nitro," "Gamma G," and "Renewtrient."

What are the effects of GHB/GBL use? GHB/GBL are said to break down social inhibitions, enhance sexual experiences, and produce euphoria in the user. When combined with other substances, the effects are intensified. Intoxication can induce nausea, vomiting, dizziness, lethargy, respiratory depression, and coma.

How are GHB/GBL obtained? GBL can be purchased directly from wholesale chemical stores, but may also be extracted from common varnish or woodstripping products sold at hardware stores. A number of Internet sites provide access to the drugs and manufacturing instructions, and some sites have registered more than a quarter of a million "hits."

What is the legal status of GHB/GBL? The FDA took GHB off the market in 1990 and in January 1999 asked for the recall of all GBL products. While GHB is illegal in some states, there is no current federal scheduling for the drug. But, the DEA has recommended that GHB be classified as a controlled substance and is waiting for the scientific evaluation of the FDA. At this time, it is unclear whether GBL would then be considered an analog thus making it illegal under the Analogs Act of 1986. GHB and GBL are not illegal in Maryland.

The DEWS Alert is a special issue of the DEWS Fax that CESAR uses to share information about new drugs appearing in the state. It is our hope that building an understanding about a drug before it becomes a problem may help prevent a crisis from occurring. A complete list of sources used in this fax is available on the DEWS website (www.cesar.umd.edu/DEWS.html).

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