
An Update on GHB Use in Maryland and the Nation

Initial toxicology reports indicate that GHB was present in the blood of a University of Maryland College Park student who died on September 5th. While the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner currently does not routinely test for GHB, they will begin testing for it on a case by case basis within six months.

What is GHB?

Gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) is a central nervous system depressant that was initially sold in health food stores to stimulate muscle growth and burn fat. GHB, also known as “G” or “liquid ecstasy,” is often used in social environments, such as parties, clubs, and raves, to break down inhibitions and produce euphoria. (For more information about GHB, see the April 1999 Special Edition of the *DEWS Fax*.) When used with other substances, including alcohol, the effects are intensified. GHB overdose can cause nausea, vomiting, unconsciousness, slowed heart rate, respiratory depression, seizures, hypothermia, coma, and death.

What is the legal status of GHB?

In 1990 the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) declared GHB unsafe and illicit and in 1999 the FDA issued a voluntary recall of GHB. In March 2000, GHB was federally classified as a Schedule I drug.

GHB Use in Maryland

The DEWS Drug Scan Project initially reported GHB use in two Maryland counties in 1998. In 2000, 15 counties reported GHB use. The Maryland Poison Center received 61 phone calls about GHB and GHB analogues in 2000. (GHB analogues are believed to be the source of GHB in 71% of persons urine-tested for GHB in Maryland.) Approximately one-half of these calls (32) involved hospital treatment.

Nationwide GHB Use

Nationally, the Drug Abuse Warning Network reports that GHB-related emergency department episodes have increased dramatically, from 56 in 1994 to 4,969 in 2000. Sixty percent of these episodes occurred among emergency department patients age 25 and under. As of November 2000, the Drug Enforcement Administration had documented 71 GHB-related deaths. However, this number probably underestimates the true number of GHB-related deaths, since GHB does not remain in the body long and is usually not tested for at autopsy.

SOURCE: Maryland Drug Early Warning System (DEWS), Center for Substance Abuse Research. For more information, contact Erin Artigiani of CESAR at 301-403-8329.

Source List
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