

# Drug Early Warning System

*Working Together to Identify Emerging Drug Trends in Maryland*

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## DEWS News

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*Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Frank Sapienza, and  
Dr. Leigh Vanocour at the DEWS Press Conference,  
September 28, 2000.*

### DEWS Press Conference

"Some people think that ecstasy is safe," said Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend on September 28. "That is wrong."

The Lt. Governor and the DEWS Action Team held a press conference at the University of Maryland, College Park, to alert the public to the dangers of ecstasy, a popular club drug. The Lt. Governor also screened a new anti-ecstasy public service announcement and presented a new state-wide Ecstasy Action Plan. The goals of the Plan are to inform and educate the public about ecstasy, intensify and focus law enforcement efforts, insure proper diagnosis and treatment of ecstasy users, and monitor ecstasy use and popularity in Maryland.

Col. David Mitchell, Superintendent of the Maryland State Police, said that one of the biggest problems associated with ecstasy is the public's perception that it is "clean."

"It's being marketed as a drug that is more socially acceptable than heroin or cocaine," he said.

The Lt. Governor noted that, in fact, ecstasy has many deleterious effects. It not only produces elevated body temperatures and dehydration, she explained, it also causes elevated serotonin levels in the brain, which can lead to long-term depression or harm thought and memory functions.

Frank Sapienza, of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, said that too many people blame ecstasy's ill effects on adulteration with other drugs. He noted that 99 percent of the pills screened by the DEA did not contain other drugs and that the effects of ecstasy appear to be related directly to ecstasy itself and not to chemical impurities.

To help curb ecstasy use, Col. Mitchell described several new law enforcement strategies that will be a part of the state's response to ecstasy's increased popularity. Tactics will include closing down clubs that don't meet health department standards and changing zoning codes to limit club sites. "We'll be looking at local zoning and ordinance boards to target locations that are hosting rave parties," said Mitchell.

The state police are also "looking at the penalty issue," according to Mitchell. Currently, the penalty for ecstasy distribution is five years, while the penalty for

*("Press," continued on back page)*

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## What Young Offenders Are Saying



*The OPUS (Offender Population Urinalysis Screening) Intake Study interviews youths in juvenile justice facilities to obtain data on emerging trends in drug use. The following are summaries of youths' views of drug use by their peers. Two counties will be featured in each newsletter. This issue highlights Howard and Worcester Counties.*

### Howard County

#### Ecstasy

Results of interviews with 70 youths suggest that ecstasy has become more popular in Howard County. OPUS respondents name several varieties of the drug and mention brand names such as Superman, X-Files, Mitsubishi, Buddhas, and White Diamonds. The youths explain that some pills are apparently twice or three times as potent as others; these pills are called "double-stacked" and "triple-stacked" pills, respectively. According to one OPUS youth, "Ecstasy is the most used drug out there, and it's very socially accepted. It is so popular because you only have to swallow a pill. . . . Everyone does it." Youths in Howard County report that in addition to MDMA, the pills may include cocaine, speed, heroin, LSD, rat poison, Ajax, and mescaline. The average pill costs the user \$25.

#### GHB and Special K

Howard County youths report GHB and Ketamine as drugs new to their area. Respondents have limited knowledge of these "club drugs," but they express a negative attitude toward the drugs and their effects. The club drugs are most often associated with the rave subculture, but they recently gained popularity within the mainstream population, youths explain. GHB is reported to have effects similar to those of extreme alcohol intoxication, and because of the dangers associated with blacking out, GHB has become known as the "date rape drug." Ketamine is a veterinary tranquilizer that also produces effects of severe

intoxication referred to by OPUS respondents as a "K-hole." The drug is available in liquid form; however, users generally boil it down to a powder and snort it.

#### LSD (Acid)

Youths interviewed in Howard County list several forms of LSD available to them, such as paper tabs, gel tabs, sugar cubes, and liquid forms. Gel tabs and liquids are reportedly preferred because their effects are thought to be more potent. Also, youths report that liquid acid is preferred because it is "easier to take." The drug may simply be dropped onto the tongue using an eyedropper. Respondents state that the drug is often mixed with ecstasy; taking an ecstasy-acid combination is known as "candy-flipping."

### Worcester County

*Unique among Maryland jurisdictions, Worcester County has an Ocean City intake office open only during summer months. This office handles young people who commit crimes (e.g., alcohol- and drug-related offenses, destruction of property, theft) while on vacation. The following results are from the Ocean City office.*

#### Marijuana

Marijuana is the most prevalent illicit drug used among youths. Almost all of the 24 respondents listed marijuana as the most popular drug among youths. Interviewees named hydro as the most common form of marijuana used. Hydro, or hydroponic, is a type of marijuana grown in water; it is reportedly more expensive and of better quality than other marijuana. Marijuana is easily obtained and occasionally mixed with other drugs, including cocaine, ecstasy, and Special K (Ketamine).

#### Ecstasy

A majority of youths interviewed listed ecstasy as an increasingly popular drug. Most youths report that it is nearly as popular as marijuana and alcohol and that many youths are curious about it. As one respondent put it, "Everyone wants to try it." Brands such as Mitsubishi, Clover, and Butterfly are reportedly sold for \$25 a pill and used at a variety of venues, including raves, clubs, house parties, and the Ocean City boardwalk. OPUS interviewees believe that ecstasy is a mixture of drugs including MDMA, heroin, and cocaine. Also, respondents discussed mixing ecstasy with acid and Special K, practices known as "candy-flipping" and "speedballing," respectively.

#### Special K (Ketamine)

Ketamine, known among OPUS youths as Special K, is a veterinary anesthetic. Illicit use of the drug, which produces a depressant high known as a "black hole" or a "K-hole," is associated with the rave subculture. OPUS respondents report that, while the drug is still considered a "raver's drug," its popularity is increasing among mainstream youths. Youths in Worcester County further report that the drug is available in liquid form, but it can also be heated to a white powder and snorted.

### Staff

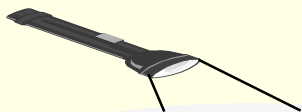
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## **Guest Feature: MDMA (Ecstasy) and Hyperthermia: What It Is and How to Treat It**

*This brief article was written by Suzanne Doyon, M.D., medical director of the Maryland Poison Center, as a special feature for DEWS News. In this article, Dr. Doyon provides specific advice on how to treat malignant hyperthermia (elevated body temperature), a symptom that has led to hospitalization in some MDMA-related cases.*

MDMA is an active ingredient in the popular club drug ecstasy, which is an emerging drug of abuse in Maryland. Ecstasy is usually consumed in pill form at rave parties or concerts. The Maryland Poison Center has collected data on more than one hundred MDMA exposures as of October 30 of this year. More than 40% of these exposures were treated in Emergency Departments (EDs). Patients were young adults in their twenties, and the ratio of men to women was about equal. More than three-quarters (80%) of the exposures occurred on weekends. The outcomes have generally been favorable.

Clinical manifestations of MDMA toxicity include agitation, seizures, hyperthermia, cardiovascular instability, electrolyte imbalances, and liver failure. The focus of this piece will be the treatment of one of the most dangerous effects of MDMA use, malignant hyperthermia.

Thermoregulation is heavily modulated by serotonin and dopamine, two brain chemicals activated by MDMA. MDMA interference with the release of these chemicals results in increased body temperature. Severe hyperthermia may trigger a cascade of events that includes muscle breakdown, renal damage, bleeding problems, and death. A strong correlation exists between hyperthermia and lowered survival rates in patients exposed to MDMA.

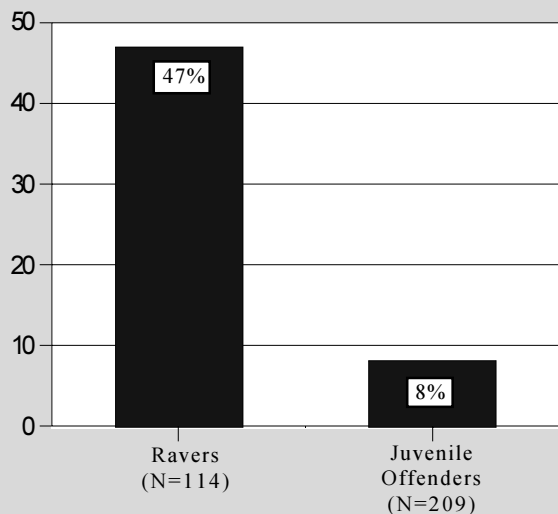
The best way to measure body temperature is by using a rectal probe. This may be a difficult, if not impossible, task for pre-hospital personnel. Tactile measurement may be the only way to assess body temperature out in the field. Pre-hospital personnel should realize the limitations and inaccuracies of this technique.

Treatment of hyperthermia is predominantly supportive with an emphasis on rapid external cooling and sedation. In the field, the patient should be removed from the scene and brought to a temperature-controlled vehicle. Wet sheets can be applied to the skin, and the air conditioning unit within the vehicle can be started. Intravenous administration of glucose, thiamine, and naloxone (depending on the clinical picture) should be initiated. Rapid transportation is recommended.

In the ED, more aggressive external cooling measures can be instituted if the core body temperature exceeds 106° F. Muscle relaxation and paralysis may be necessary if external cooling measures fail. Benzodiazepines have established their efficacy in the treatment of cocaine-induced hyperthermia and should be a first-line agent. British authors have long advocated the use of dantrolene, a muscle relaxant, in cases of MDMA-induced hyperthermia. Benzodiazepines and dantrolene can be used concomitantly. All severely hyperthermic patients should be admitted to the hospital for monitoring and observation.



## Current Ecstasy Use By Ravers and Juvenile Offenders in Maryland



NOTE: A special study currently underway to determine the level of ecstasy use in specific populations indicates that 47% of rave attendees and 8% of juvenile offenders reported using ecstasy within the past 30 days.

Source: Maryland DEWS Special Ecstasy Study, Center for Substance Abuse Research, 2000.

(“Press” continued from front page)

cocaine or heroin distribution is 20 years. Longer sentences would produce a more effective “prosecution hammer,” Mitchell said.

Speaking about the health effects of ecstasy, Lt. Governor Kennedy Townsend said that increased collaborative efforts among health institutions, the Maryland poison center, and the state would result in more rapid recognition and effective treatment of ecstasy-related symptoms.

Dr. Leigh Vanocour, an emergency room physician, noted that ecstasy works as a stimulant and increases the blood pressure and heart rate. She echoed the Lt. Governor’s concern that it can be difficult to treat some of ecstasy’s more unusual effects, including “malignant hyperthermia” (see article, p. 3). This type of hyperthermia can produce body temperatures as high as 106° F. In those who survive, the ill effects can include permanent brain damage, Vanocour said.

DEWS monitoring and study projects will continue to track ecstasy’s popularity in Maryland. Results will be used to further refine prevention, treatment, and law enforcement interventions.

Detailed information about ecstasy and the Ecstasy Action Plan is available on a special DEWS webpage, [www.ecstasyfacts.org](http://www.ecstasyfacts.org). DEWS News will also provide updates.

## DEWS<sup>News</sup>



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