

Fact Sheet (2002)

Amphetamine and Ecstasy Use in the Caribbean Region

What are amphetamines and ecstasy?

Amphetamines are addictive stimulants that dramatically affect the central nervous system.

Amphetamines are a class of drugs, that in chemical terms, are closely related to each other. This family of drugs includes amphetamines sulfate, dexamphetamines and methamphetamine.

The principal active ingredient in Ecstasy is MDMA (3-4 methyl-enedioxymethamphetamine)

MDMA also is a synthetic, psychoactive drug with both stimulant (amphetamine-like) and hallucinogenic (LSD-like) properties. The most common street name for MDMA is ecstasy, XTC.

Short-term effects

Amphetamines work by stimulating the release of various neurotransmitters (dopamine, noradrenaline and serotonin). They boost the central nervous system activity leading to an increase in physical activity, heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature and decreased appetite. They cause feeling of euphoria, well-being and confidence in users.

Similar to amphetamines, the sought-after effects of ecstasy are increased physical energy. In addition, users experience the feeling of emotional closeness to

others. Its adverse consequences comprise fatigue, anxiety, restlessness, nausea and a rise in blood pressure.

Large doses of MDMA can lead to hyperthermia, dehydration, urinary retention, seizures, strokes, heart attacks, cardiac arrhythmias, paranoia and hallucinations.

Long-term effects

Continued use of Amphetamines leads to the development of physical dependence.

Long-term effects of amphetamines comprise disorientation, apathy, exhaustion, strong psychological dependence and with continued use, a state similar to paranoid psychosis may develop.

The long-term effects of MDMA are difficult to identify as Ecstasy tablets are often adulterated with a range of psychoactive substances.

Although physical dependence on MDMA does not seem to develop, physical dependence on the other substances contained in Ecstasy tablets (e.g. amphetamines) may occur.

There are concerns that MDMA (ecstasy) may have toxic effects on the brain and other organ tissue in users.

Mode of administration

Different types of amphetamines can be administered via snorting, smoking, swallowing and injections.

Ecstasy is available in tablet form and administered via swallowing.

Demand of amphetamines and ecstasy in the Caribbean

Although there are only a few systematic measures of the consumption of ecstasy and amphetamine use in the Caribbean region as expressed in lifetime use among school children, there is a growing concern of its spread in the region nurtured by recent findings from surveys and data from law enforcement agencies.

Several surveys showed that amphetamines are used among young people in the Caribbean. In the Cayman Islands 2.3% (2000) of students aged 12-18 years reported lifetime use of "ice" (crystal methamphetamine). In Jamaica, a study among post primary students showed that 3.4% of eleventh graders have (at least once) used amphetamines (prescribed and non-prescribed) in their lifetime (1997). The highest prevalence was found in a study among street children in Haiti (2000). Last month prevalence rates were 9.5% among all street children age 11-19 years and among those aged 15-18 years last month prevalence was estimated at 11.7%.

Lifetime use of ecstasy in the Caribbean ranges from 1-2% For example, among school students

age 12- 20 years in the Dominican Republic (2000) 1.2% used ecstasy in their lifetime and 1% lifetime use was reported among students aged 12-18 years in Aruba (2001). In the Cayman Islands, 1.6% among 16-year olds in the Cayman Islands used ecstasy in their life (2000).

More research needed

Due to the fact that amphetamines belong to a family of different types of drugs, which have different addictive potential, further research should investigate what type of amphetamines youths are taking.

Supply of amphetamines and ecstasy in the Caribbean

In addition to drug demand data, indicators of supply from law enforcement agencies also contribute to the growing concern that ecstasy will enter the local markets in Caribbean countries.

According to the Central Police Department in Aruba, the most significant trend over the last few years has been the increase of confiscated ecstasy tablets. In 2001, 58,795 ecstasy tablets were seized among aircraft passengers arriving and departing from Aruba. Another factor that may contribute to its spread to the local market in Aruba is its price. While in the US an ecstasy tablet is sold for 25 US\$, consumers in Aruba can purchase a table for 25 Florine (14.4 US\$).

Similar, data from law enforcement agencies in Curacao show that in 2000, 39,294 tablets containing ecstasy were seized.

In 2000 the local police in Jamaica made the first reported seizure of ecstasy tablets (5,070 in total). Despite the fact that such figures could be misleading as a guide to the level of increasing local usage as the tablets were about to be exported, there is evidence that the drug is also used locally, especially at uptown "rave parties" and night clubs (The Jamaica Gleaner (Thursday February 14, 2002).

Other countries where ecstasy was seized in 2000/2001 include Bermuda, the Bahamas, Cuba, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Guadeloupe, Guyana, and Suriname (CCM, Illicit Drug Trends Reports 2000/2001).

The origin of ecstasy tablets destined for the US market is thought to be Europe. Due to a strong air traffic link between Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles these countries seem especially destined as trafficking points for ecstasy entering the U.S. Amphetamines are relatively simple to produce which might enable new clandestine laboratory operators to start activities in this field. Of particular concern are newly discovered illegal laboratories for the production of synthetic drugs, including ecstasy in Colombia that will very likely increase the availability of amphetamine and ecstasy in the Caribbean. In February 1999, the Department of Administrative Security (DAS) in Cali (Colombia) seized Colombia's

first known MDMA laboratory. The trafficking organization responsible for this laboratory had a distribution network throughout Colombia, as well as in Mexico and in Miami, Florida. According to the DAS, this trafficking organization was able to manufacture 3,000 tablets every eight days. Since then other laboratories were detected in Colombia, the last one in May 2002.

Summary

Although the Caribbean is at present not experiencing an epidemic of amphetamines and ecstasy use as seen in the United States and Europe, stimulants are posing an increased danger because they are gaining popularity among teenagers in the Caribbean as revealed in recent drug surveys. In addition, stimulants of this nature are increasingly available due to the fact that trafficking routes originating in Europe are passing through the Caribbean and the increased possibility of tablets that were produced in South America (i.e. Colombia). Availability of the drugs combined with increasing popularity may very likely reinforce local markets and thus pose a new threat to Caribbean youth.

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In February 1999, the Department of Administrative Security (DAS) in Cali seized Colombia's only known MDMA laboratory. The trafficking organization responsible for this laboratory reportedly had a distribution network throughout Colombia, as well as in Mexico and in Miami, Florida. According to the DAs, this trafficking organization was able to manufacture 3,000 tablets every eight days and to sell each tablet on the black market for the equivalent of US\$23. This may denote an experimentation phase of MDMA production in Colombia. On August 17, 2000, British authorities seized a parcel containing 3,900 MDMA tablets at Heathrow International Airport. The parcel arrived on a British Airlines flight from Bogota, Colombia. Each pill contained 18% MDMA, which is lower purity than a typical MDMA pill. It has not been confirmed at this time if the MDMA was produced in Colombia.

Sección: INFORMACION GENERAL Publicación: BOGOTA	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sábado 1 de Junio de 2002	
En una operación conjunta de la Policía Nacional, el FBI y la DEA fueron incautadas más de 120.000 pastillas de la droga sintética éxtasis.	
221 palabras.	