

Tip Sheet

AADAC Youth Services

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Raves and “Club Drugs”

AADAC Adult Counselling &

Prevention Services

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Raves are all-night dance parties, held outdoors or in dance clubs, old warehouses or other large indoor spaces. They are promoted by word-of-mouth, through flyers, or in rave culture magazines.

Many of the concerns about raves are the same as your concerns would be about any party your teenager attends. At any party, you will want to know that your teenager will be able to say NO to illegal or dangerous activities, to unwanted sexual advances, and to the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. You will want to know that the person who drives them to or from the party is alert, sober, and competent to drive. You also want them to go to the party with friends who are sensible and responsible, who will not pressure your teen to make unwise choices.

The dangers that are unique to raves come from the easy availability of drugs, the strenuous physical activity, and the physical conditions: crowding, poor ventilation and flashing strobe lights are common at raves. Young Canadians have had seizures or other physical consequences at raves, and some have died. There are real dangers in attending a rave, but it is important to remember that physical danger due to falls, drowning, violence, and actual overdose have always been associated with recreational drug use, and most especially with alcohol.

If your teenager attends raves, make sure that they know what to expect and what they can do to stay safe. As with any other topic, you will want to talk honestly with your teen about raves. Remember to listen as well as talk. Encourage them to ask you questions, but make sure that you have some answers, and know where to find more information. Set guidelines for your teen's behaviour (e.g. Do you want to ban attending raves, or set a curfew? What alternative activity would you allow?) Be prepared to talk about your guidelines and to renegotiate them as your teen matures.

RAVES AND HEAT STROKE

Most deaths at raves result from over-heating and dehydration. Crowding, poor ventilation, and non-stop dancing contribute to water loss through perspiration, and to dangerously high body temperatures. Many “ravers” know this, but often they do not know that you can also drink too much water (e.g. more than four cups of water an hour). People who are dancing should drink about two cups of water an hour to rehydrate and to help the body regulate its temperature. Isotonic sports drinks like Gatorade® and Powerade® are **NOT** advised if ravers are also taking the drug MDMA or ecstasy.

Raves usually have a “chill” area, a good place for dancers to rest. A good guideline is to rest 15 minutes for every hour of dancing (just as you do a cool-down after a physical fitness class.)

The warning signs of overheating and dehydration are: feeling hot, unwell and confused; dark urine or being unable to urinate; not sweating even when dancing; being unable to speak properly; headache; vomiting; high resting heart rate; and fainting, collapsing or convulsing.

At the first sign of dehydration, ravers should lie or sit down, sip water slowly and splash some on their skin, and ask a friend to stay with them, perhaps fanning them, until they are well again.

DRUGS AND RAVES

Many of the dancers at a rave are not there to use drugs, although drugs tend to be available. The dancing and companionship are the biggest draw. Most ravers, a recent study found, disapprove of smoking crack cocaine, drinking alcohol, or injecting drugs.

That said, there is a permissive attitude towards drugs at raves, with cannabis being the drug that ravers are most likely to have used. The drug that most people associate with raves however, is ecstasy.

Ecstasy (methylenedioxymethamphetamine or MDMA) is a stimulant that allows ravers to dance all night, and makes them feel happy, confident, and loving towards others. Ecstasy interferes with the brain's ability to regulate body temperature, so dancers who take ecstasy greatly increase their danger of overheating.

Ecstasy has been blamed when ravers have had heart attack and stroke. These incidents are very rare and, in each case, ecstasy was not the only possible cause. Sometimes there were other drugs present, and sometimes the raver had a pre-existing medical problem that could be triggered by the dancing alone.

The cautions about using ecstasy are similar to the caution about using many drugs, including legally prescribed drugs. Ecstasy is especially dangerous if you have a personal or family history of heart disease, kidney or liver problems, neurological problems (e.g. Parkinsonism, Tourette's syndrome, and Epilepsy) or psychiatric illness (e.g. Depression, Schizophrenia). Ecstasy should not be combined with certain antidepressants (e.g. Prozac, Zoloft), with weight-loss medication, or blood pressure medications.

Taking ecstasy has one important difference from taking prescribed drugs; however, it is difficult for the user to know that he/she is getting pure ecstasy. So-called ecstasy tablets have been found to contain many other more dangerous drugs.

Regular (i.e. weekly) use of ecstasy can be a problem, as you will build up tolerance, needing more of the drug to get the same effect. It is not physically addictive, but people do become dependent on the rave scene, including the drugs, to have fun and feel good about themselves.

Ecstasy often produces a "hangover" effect, which can last several days after it is taken. Symptoms may include depression, drowsiness, muscle aches, poor appetite, sleeplessness, and poor concentration. If a person is using the drug every weekend, this can mean that ecstasy takes over most of their life.

As always, it is safest to use no drugs at all. It is certainly possible and acceptable to have fun at a rave without taking drugs.

Although ecstasy is the best known, there are other drugs that may be present at raves, including the following:

Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), sometimes called "liquid ecstasy" relieves anxiety, promotes relaxation, and produces a euphoric feeling. Overdose can happen quickly, and can be fatal. GHB is odorless and tasteless, and is sold as a clear liquid, or as a tablet, capsule or white powder.

Ketamine is an anaesthetic mainly used on animals. It can produce euphoria, as well as hallucinations, "mystical" revelations, and pleasant feelings of stimulation and of floating. It is sold on the street as a liquid, or in capsules, tablets, crystals or powders. Recreational users inject or snort it. They experience impaired thinking, confusion, dizziness, clumsiness and slurred speech. At high doses, users have trouble breathing, and risk death. Those who inject it and share needles risk bacterial and viral infections including hepatitis and HIV.

LSD is a powerful hallucinogen. The senses are distorted, and it may be difficult to judge distance and time. Users may feel a sense of wonder and joy, or they may become anxious and panicky (a "bad trip"). LSD is sold as tablets, capsules, liquid, or absorbed onto blotting paper or sugar cubes.

Although people refer to the drugs discussed above as "club drugs" they are very often consumed in other places and circumstances. More information on these drugs, and help in dealing with teen drug use in general, is available from your local AADAC office, or at the website, <www.aadac.com>.