

INPUD ALERT

6 January 2015



Avoidable PMA deaths amongst people intending to take MDMA/ecstasy

Prohibition results in people mistakenly taking toxic and contaminated drugs

Over the holiday period (December 2014-January 2015), there have been a spate of deaths in the UK of people who had thought they were using ecstasy/MDMA pills. It seems that, yet again, people who have intended to take MDMA have mistakenly used drugs containing PMA (para-Methoxyamphetamine).

MDMA is substantially less harmful to the individual than many psychoactive drugs (including drugs that are frequently not criminalised, such as alcohol), and its being classed as a Class A drug in the UK is thus nonsensical as a measure of relative harm. But drug prohibition and criminalisation result in drugs being produced in a black market context: there is no quality control, and people who use illicit drugs can rarely be certain of content of the drugs that they take. **Prohibition has resulted in people *mistakenly* taking PMA, an enormously dangerous drug that they did not intend to take.**

A failure to provide harm reduction interventions results in avoidable deaths

Additionally, these deaths could have been avoided if sufficient harm reduction had been available: pill testing facilities, as are available in The Netherlands, would have allowed people who use MDMA/ecstasy to safely test the contents of their drugs, and to avoid drugs containing PMA without fear of legal repercussion.

Summary, and INPUD's PMA Warning (recirculated):

In summary, these deaths did not occur due to the risks of using MDMA or ecstasy. They occurred:

- 1: due to prohibition resulting in contaminated drugs being bought and sold;**
- 2: due to the government's failure to establish drug testing centres.**

In order to reduce drug-related morbidity and mortality, the war on drugs (which is, in reality, a war on people who use illicit drugs) must end, and global prohibition must end. Additionally, harm reduction interventions – including drug testing facilities and safer drug using information and education, particularly peer-education – are urgently needed.

The International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) has **previously published a PMA warning, entitled [PMA Contaminated Ecstasy and MDMA - Alert for MDMA and Ecstasy Users](#).¹ It contains some background information on PMA, warning signs to watch out for if you have used MDMA/ecstasy, and provides some more specific harm reduction information too. Crucially,**

“if you think you, or anyone that you know, may have taken PMA, or if you/they start feeling hot (and don't quickly cool down), confused, or sick, get yourself/them to the hospital immediately... The faster you get help, the better your chances.”

It is lamentable that such a document, published during a spate of deaths in 2013, now needs to be recirculated in 2015 in the context of yet more avoidable deaths of people who use drugs.

¹ Available at http://www.inpud.net/PMA_Warning_INPUD_Oct2013.pdf