

May 2016

INPUD Statement Drug Testing Kit Provision



International Network of People who Use Drugs

INPUD Supports Students for Sensible Drug Policy UK's Harm Reduction Initiative

PMA Contaminated Ecstasy

The International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) supports the initiative of Students for Sensible Drug Policy UK (SSDP UK) in providing [drug testing kits and harm reduction](#) information to students at Newcastle University. In recent years, there have been spates of deaths amongst people who have taken drugs contaminated with toxic and dangerous adulterants. Specifically, numerous people have unnecessarily died from ecstasy contaminated with *para*-Methoxyamphetamine (PMA), these deaths peaking in 2012 and 2013, with yet more deaths last year and this year again. PMA is a dangerous compound that prevents the reabsorption of serotonin, thus significantly increasing the risk of overdose, serotonin syndrome, hyperthermia, seizures/convulsions, and death. This is a starkly different drug from what should ideally be the active ingredient of ecstasy, MDMA, which is substantially safer than many other psychoactive substances. INPUD has in the past published [PMA warnings](#),¹ as well as a [harm reduction guide](#)² outlining what to bear in mind when taking MDMA and/or ecstasy. These pointers bear repeating, especially given that **ecstasy in much of Europe can now contain extremely high levels of MDMA** (up to 250mg per pill, certainly not a safe amount to drop all at once):

- If you're going to take ecstasy or MDMA that you're unfamiliar with, **avoid taking a whole pill**, and absolutely do not double drop.
- **Start with a half**, or even a quarter of a pill (this sounds tame and dull, and of course you want a lovely come-up, but even small amounts of PMA can be dangerous).
- **Wait for a while to feel any effects** – PMA can take longer to have an effect, so don't be tricked into upping your dose. Wait for an hour; if nothing has happened, wait for two hours.
- The same applies if you are bombing MDMA – halve your usual dose (a 16th of a gram instead of an 8th for a first bomb). If you are snorting MDMA, have a far smaller line and wait for a while to see what it does.

The Harms of the War on Drugs and Prohibition

'Just say no' campaigns are patronising and, to be blunt, do not work. As our friends at SSDP UK quite rightly note, **"Just say no" has failed our generation**". INPUD would stress that such **prohibitionist messages have failed drug users of all ages all over the world**. People continue to take drugs, and these drug testing kits mean that young people who use drugs will be able to test their drugs for some adulterants, and also provide much needed opportunity to offer peer-driven harm reduction education to young people who use drugs and the public at large.

But let us not forget why drugs have come to be contaminated, and why people do not know the purity of the drugs that they use: due to the black market production of drugs in the context of prohibition, there are **no proper mechanisms to monitor and control the content and quality of drugs**, as there are for legal alcohol and tobacco production. It is due to prohibition and the so-called 'war on drugs' that these unnecessary deaths and overdoses are occurring, just as those who go blind and/or die from consumption of illicitly produced alcohol are victims of prohibition. **These unnecessary deaths demonstrate that the war on drugs is a war on people who use drugs themselves – a war that must end now.**

A Lack of Harm Reduction Interventions

Yet again, the lamentable gaps in comprehensive harm reduction services have had to be filled by enterprising civil society organisations. But these drug testing kits are not enough and we (and SSDP UK themselves) urge caution in that testing kits **can be unreliable and inaccurate, may not identify relevant contaminants accurately, and also do not indicate the levels of pills' contents**. **Comprehensive harm reduction interventions must be rolled out, and substance analysis and drug purity/content testing facilities, which are far more accurate than drug testing kits, must be rolled out by governments as a matter of urgency.** Though various governments' (misguided) ambition may be to abolish drug use, this does not alter the fact that people are currently using drugs and people are *avoidably* dying from contaminated drugs.

People who use drugs have [the right to the highest attainable standard of health](#),³ and this specifically includes harm reduction services and access to accurate education, information, and knowledge. Harm reduction saves lives. **We applaud SSDP UK – as well as all of the different civil society projects around the world that instigate much needed harm reduction strategies – for their enterprising endeavours to fill these gaps in service provision for young people who use drugs.**

¹ Available at http://www.inpud.net/INPUD_Alert_Avoidable_PMA_deaths_6.1.15.pdf

² Available at http://www.inpud.net/PMA_Warning_INPUD_Oct2013.pdf

³ The *Human Rights of People who Use Drugs* are Available in INPUD's *Consensus Statement*, available at <http://www.inpud.net/en/news/inpud-consensus-statement-drug-use-under-prohibition-human-rights-health-and-law>

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