

Ecstasy deaths linked to raised body temperature

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A University of Adelaide study has revealed that effects of the drug ecstasy are compounded when taken in warm environments.

Preclinical research undertaken by Pharmacology PhD student Emily Jaehne shows that ecstasy deaths, which are invariably related to elevated body temperature, may be related to drug users' failure to recognise their body is abnormally hot.

"The fact that these drugs are often taken in warm nightclubs and at rave parties increases the risk of long- term changes in brain function, or even death," Emily says.

The 25-year-old student has spent the past three years investigating how ecstasy can increase body temperature, and to understand how drug users respond when this happens.

"Our bodies usually maintain a constant temperature of 37 degrees Celsius, but in some cases ecstasy can elevate this by up to five degrees, leading to severe brain damage."

Ecstasy is one of the most popular illicit drugs in Australia, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, with almost 24% of the population aged between 20-29 years admitting to using it in their lifetime. Statistics also show that Australia has one of the highest per capita uses of ecstasy in the world.

"Ecstasy is more readily available here than in the U.S. and Europe and more widely used than heroin or cocaine in Australia. It is crucial, therefore, that we make people more aware of the dangers associated with this drug," Emily says. "When ecstasy users are taking the drug in nightclubs they tend to blame the surroundings for their elevated body temperature and just ignore the warning signs. That can be fatal."

Emily has recently been awarded a \$2500 Mutual Community Postgraduate Travel Grant to present her findings at an international drug conference in Puerto Rico in June.

She is due to submit her thesis within the next 12 months under the supervision of Dr Rod Irvine from the Discipline of Pharmacology.

Source: University of Adelaide

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