

EU drug agency: Ecstasy is making a comeback among the young

May 31 2016, by Barry Hatton

Ecstasy is becoming popular again in the European Union, with online sales and targeted marketing helping to drive the revival among a new generation of users, the EU drug agency said Tuesday.

MDMA, also known as ecstasy, has returned as "a common stimulant of choice for young people," the agency said in its annual report on drug trends in the 28-nation bloc.

Ecstasy first established itself in the illegal drug market in the 1990s, but its use declined at the end of the last decade amid poor drug quality and adulteration.

Officials are concerned about a "dramatic increase" in the potency of some new ecstasy tablets, Paul Griffiths, the agency's scientific director, told a news conference. Also, young ecstasy users may be "more naive" about the potentially fatal risks of overheating and dehydration when taking ecstasy.

Griffiths said producers and traffickers are using "sophisticated marketing techniques" to sell more ecstasy. They include tablets that glow in the dark and others that are manufactured for specific events, such as festivals.

Authorities believe most ecstasy in the EU is produced in or around the Netherlands, the Lisbon, Portugal-based agency said.

Despite ecstasy's return its use is still dwarfed by the popularity of cannabis. That remains the EU's biggest-selling drug in money terms with an estimated annual retail value of 9.3 billion euros (\$10.3 billion) in 2013, the last year for which full figures are available. The retail market for illicit drugs in the EU was at least 24 billion euros in 2013, the agency said.

Heroin sales are estimated to be the second-highest, at 6.8 billion euros, followed by cocaine at 5.7 billion euros. Sales of MDMA are believed to total almost 700 million euros.

Cannabis offenses, mostly involving use or possession for personal use, account for close to three-fourths of all drug-related offenses in the EU.

The agency said online drug sales appear to be growing, representing an "important new challenge for drug policy."

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