

CCENDU Bulletin

Substance-related Harms at Canadian Music Festivals from May to July 2017

CCSA and Mass Gathering Medicine's 2015 report, [Preventing Drug- and Alcohol-related Harms at Music Festivals in Canada](#), made a number of recommendations to improve the health and safety of Canadians attending music festivals. One recommendation highlighted the need for those associated with festivals to share more rapidly information about known drug risks so that organizers of upcoming festivals are aware of new trends and can learn from experience. To meet this end, this bulletin presents data and anecdotal reports on substance-related harms at recent Canadian music festivals. The bulletin can serve to inform those providing harm reduction and medical services at upcoming music festivals.

Researchers conducted informal interviews with individuals who provided harm reduction or medical services at music festivals held in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec between May 1, 2017, and July 31, 2017. The goal was to gather information on substance-related harms, specifically focusing on new or unexpected differences in substance use this year compared to previous years. This bulletin summarizes information collected from these interviews, and is intended for a broad audience including event organizers, harm reduction, medical and health service providers, health professionals, law enforcement professionals and others involved with music festivals.

Findings

Respondents noted that, overall, harms associated with substance use at music festivals this year did not differ from previous years. Several respondents indicated that they felt there was a greater investment in messaging and public awareness campaigns this year aimed at reducing drug-related harms prior to as well as throughout music festivals and that this effort had a positive impact. The following common substances continue to be associated with harms:

- **Alcohol**, alone and in combination with other substances, continues to be a substance that is associated with harms at festivals. Respondents reported the perception that there was an increase in "pre-drinking" alcohol before music festivals.
- Pills, powders and tablets sold as **ecstasy, MDMA or molly** continue to have unpredictable effects because it is difficult to know **what** substance or substances are included or **how much** of the active substances are included. Drug-checking services, when offered, continue to identify pills, powders and tablets thought to be one substance, but testing positive for another known or unknown substance or substances.
- Respondents indicated that **other substances** such as gamma-hydroxybutyrate (**GHB**) and **ketamine** continue to be available and are associated with harms. Some respondents reported that they had verbal reports about the availability of substances with effects comparable to phencyclidine (PCP), isopropylphenidate, 4-fluoroamphetamine (4-FA), 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylcathinone (methyline), and alprazolam (Xanax®).



There were no reports of opioid overdoses at any music festival. Despite the absence of any reported opioid-related harms, respondents recognized the continued risk of opioid overdoses and recommended that festival organizers have a strategy in place to mitigate potential harms. Strategies include having naloxone and staff trained in how to administer it on site, providing naloxone training workshops on site and allowing festival attendees to carry it on their person, and providing needle distribution programs and drug-checking services to support festival attendees.

CCENDU will continue to monitor substance-related harms at music festivals in Canada over the course of the summer. Anyone who is aware of such harms is encouraged to contact CCSA to share information. If there are any questions, comments, information to contribute or corrections to the information contained in this bulletin, or if you wish to subscribe and receive updates as new information becomes available, please contact CCENDU@ccsa.ca.

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Prepared by the CCSA in partnership with the
Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU)

The Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (CCENDU) is a nation-wide network of community level partners who share information about local trends and emerging issues in substance use and exchange knowledge and tools to support more effective data collection.

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