

Pill Testing at Music Festivals

The facts as we know them

Illicit Drug Use in Australia

Use of illicit drugs is not a new issue and not one confined to young people.



42% of Australians aged 14 years or older reported use of illicit drug use in their lifetime

Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey



1 IN 10 people aged 14 years had been a victim of an illicit-related incident in the previous 12 months.

Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey

Putting the figures into perspective

In January 2019 there was one drug related death at Sydney's FOMO Festival which was attended by over 11,000 people. Approximately 10,000+ people attended the FOMO festival in Adelaide with no recorded fatalities. While every death is tragic, to put this into perspective, in Australia there were:

6 suspected drug related deaths at music festivals

2018-2019

122 fatalities of drivers aged 25 years and under

2018

406 suicides of young people aged between 15 and 24

2018

What is pill testing in relation to Music Festivals?

There are several key elements to a festival based pill testing operation: information gathering, testing, and drug & alcohol education.

In summary a Chemist takes a small scrape of a pill, or some granules of a powder, and tests them to determine the main compounds and the quantity of those compounds. For example an MDMA pill might only contain a low amount of MDMA with the remainder of the pill consisting of a filler or cutting agent such as baby powder, powdered milk or dietary or vitamin supplements. The quality of the compounds can have a significant impact on the toxicity of the pill.

The Chemist then provides a summary of the main compounds, and their quality, to the festival attendee, along with education on the risks of consuming the identified substances, harm minimisation strategies and links/referrals to local support services.

What we think.

As a harm minimisation organisation our programs are focused on educating young people about illicit drugs so that they understand what they are, how they are made, what's in them and the risks associated with taking them, as well as strategies to minimise harm to themselves and others. This also includes recognising the signs of a drug overdose and when to seek medical attention.

We agree that the best way to stay safe from drugs is to not to take them. However, for those young people that choose to experiment with drugs, as young people have done for decades, we believe that every opportunity should be taken to continue education so that young people are making informed choices, and if they make bad ones, then they know what to do about it. Pill testing is not "the" solution to preventing deaths at music festivals, but coupled with an extensive education program, it can be one of several useful strategies to reduce harm.

Why the focus on Music Festivals?

Over the past 12 months there have been six suspected drug related deaths of young people aged 25 and under at Music Festivals in New South Wales and Melbourne



Festival goers who engage in prolonged dancing, with a limited water intake, are prone to heat exhaustion and dehydration. Drugs such as MDMA increase heart rate and blood pressure and prevent the body from regulating temperature, which can result in overheating and in some cases, liver, kidney or heart failure.

In addition, while regulated pharmaceutical drugs are produced in strict quality standards and controlled doses, illicit drug markets have no safety standards. Products can be contaminated and adulterated, leading to unintentional overdose by users unaware of the strengths and purity of the drugs and or intended reactions to the contents.



What are the main arguments in the pill testing debate?

Zero Tolerance (Abstinence)

These drugs are illegal. The best way to keep young people safe from drugs is to stop them from taking them. Pill testing sends the wrong message to young people that it is acceptable to consume illicit drugs.

VS

Harm Minimisation

While these drugs are illegal, young people taking them should understand what they are taking and the associated risks. Pill testing provides an additional strategy to help minimize harm to young people who decide to experiment with drugs.

SAMMY D FOUNDATION
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The Sammy D Foundation educates young people on the impacts of bullying, violence and drug and alcohol misuse.

By providing relevant age appropriate information, knowledge and tools, the Foundation empowers young people to make positive life decisions for a better community.

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