What are Club Drugs?

“Club Drugs” is a vague term that refers to a large variety of drugs. They earn their “Club” distinction due to the notoriety of their frequent use in nightclubs, parties, bars, “trances,” and “raves” across the United States. But in the past few years, these drugs have been found increasingly in more mainstream settings. Due to the uncertainty of their sources (i.e. pharmacological agents, chemicals used to manufacture them, and contaminants) it is often difficult to determine symptoms, toxicity, and consequences of using a “club drug”. Due to the fact that club drugs are frequently colorless, tasteless, and odorless, unscrupulous individuals can undetectably add them to beverages. They are added to intoxicate, sedate, or assault others. Club Drugs continue to be used to commit sexual assaults. However effort are being made to decrease this by the pharmaceutical company that produces Rohypnol by making it turn blue if added to a drink.

Research has shown that the use of club drug can cause serious health problems and, in some cases, death. Used in combination with alcohol, these drugs can be even more dangerous. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has identified several common club drugs (Methamphetamine, MDMA, GHB, Ketamine, Rohypnol, and LSD) needing more attention.

Data on students reported through the 2003 Monitoring the Future survey showed declines in MDMA (Ecstasy), and LSD. The use of methamphetamine, Rohypnol, ketamine, and GHB remained unchanged. According to the 2004 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, Ecstasy was the most commonly used club drug. However, following the national trend, the prevalence of Ecstasy use reported by Florida students has declined over the past two years. This use was most pronounced among high school students, where use dropped from 2.7% in 2002 to 1.3% in 2004.

Methamphetamine

Street Names: Speed, Ice, Chalk, Meth, Crystal, Crank, Fire, Glass

Methamphetamine is a toxic and addictive stimulant that affects the body’s central nervous system. The drug is often produced in clandestine laboratories from inexpensive ingredients in available over-the-counter cold medications. Florida law now requires purchase of these type of products be regulated by the store. Methamphetamine use has crept across the country, becoming an increasing problem in Florida.

Methamphetamine exists in many forms and is used by many groups, including young adults who attend all-night “raves”. The drug may be smoked, snorted, injected, or ingested. It is a white, odorless, bitter-tasting powder, easily dissolved in drinkable liquids.
through drug networks instead of on the streets. 

Methamphetamine is neurotoxic. Often causing significant reduction in dopamine transporters. The drug is linked with serious health problems including memory loss, aggression, violence, psychotic behavior and cardiopulmonary damage. Methamphetamine use contributes to a higher rate of infectious disease transmission, particularly HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

**Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)**

Street Names: *Ecstasy, XTC, X, Adam, Clarity, Lover's Speed*

MDMA was developed in the early 20th Century as a chemical precursor used to synthesize pharmaceuticals. MDMA, chemically, is similar to both the stimulant amphetamine and the hallucinogen mescaline. Therefore MDMA has both a stimulant and hallucinogenic effect.

MDMA is most often taken orally in the forms of tablets and capsules. The effects can often last approximately 3 to 6 hours. It has been reported that confusion, depression, sleep problems, anxiety, and paranoia occur weeks after the drug has been taken.

MDMA can significantly increase heart rate and blood pressure and a sense of alertness similar to amphetamine use. Due to the stimulant effect MDMA allows its users to dance for extended periods leading to dehydration, hypertension, and heart or kidney failure.

In high doses MDMA is extremely dangerous. It may cause an increase in body temperature leading to muscle breakdown, kidney and cardiovascular system failure, and death. MDMA has been linked to heart attacks, strokes, and seizures in some users.

MDMA users can become dehydrated causing increased water consumption. In some cases this can lead to hyponatremia (water intoxication).

This is a condition in which a person consumes so much water that there is a dramatic decrease in electrolytes.

Recent animal studies have shown that binge use of MDMA is toxic to the heart. Arrhythmia, heart muscle damage, and reductions in heart rate and blood pressure. Initial use of MDMA increases the heart rate and blood pressure, but with repeated use the effects are reversed.

MDMA is also neurotoxic. Chronic abuse of MDMA was found in lab animals and humans to produce long-lasting, perhaps permanent, damage to the neurons that release serotonin, and consequently produce memory impairment.

**Gamma-hyroxybutyrate (GHB)**

Street Names: *Grievous Bodily Harm, G, Liquid Ecstasy, Georgia Home Boy*

GHB can be produced in liquid, powder, tablet, and capsule form. GHB is often used in combination with alcohol, often increasing the level of danger. GHB has been increasingly involved in overdoses, poisonings, date rapes, and deaths. The drug is used predominately by young adults and adolescents attending nightclubs and “raves”. It is also popular in gay male communities. GHB is often produced in homes from recipes and ingredients that are readily available to be found and purchased through the Internet.

GHB has intoxicating/seditative/euphoriant properties that lead to its abuse. It also has growth hormone releasing effects that can lead to muscle growth. GHB is often synthesized in home laboratories using gamma-butyrolactone (GBL) and 1,4-Butanediol. Both ingredients are readily found in businesses selling health and dietary supplements. They are used to induce sleep, build muscles, and enhance sexual performance.

GHB is a central nervous system depressant that acts to relax and sedate the user. However at higher doses, GHB can slow breathing and heart
rate to extremely dangerous levels.

The effects of GHB can last typically up to 4 hours. The effects of GHB, depending on how it is taken, can begin within 10 to 20 minutes. At lower doses GHB relieves anxiety and produces relaxation. As the dosage increases the sedative effect may increase to result in sleep and eventual coma or death. Overdoses of GHB can happen rather quickly. Signs of overdose include: drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, headache, loss of consciousness, loss of motor reflexes, impaired breathing, and ultimately death.

GHB is cleared from the body relatively easy, making it difficult to detect. This difficulty often leads to complexity in treating overdoses and trouble in cases of sexual abuse of the user.

In 2002, the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of GHB for cataplexy (condition in which muscles go suddenly limp).

**Ketamine**

Street Names: *Special K, K, Vitamin K, Cat Valiums*

Ketamine is an anesthetic that is injectable and is approved for use by animals and humans since 1970. 90% of legally sold Ketamine used is in the veterinary field. Ketamine increased in popularity as a drug of abuse in the 1980s when it was discovered that large doses of the drug caused hallucinogenic effects similar to phencyclidine (PCP).

Ketamine is made in liquid or as a white powder. It is often snorted or smoked with tobacco or marijuana. It has been reported that some users are injecting Ketamine.

High doses of Ketamine produce symptoms of delirium, amnesia, impaired motor function, high blood pressure, depression, and potentially fatal respiratory problems. Intoxication with lower doses produced impaired learning ability, memory, and attention.

**Rohypnol**

Street Names: *Roofies, Rophies, Roche, Forget-me Pill, Roofinol*

Rohypnol belongs to the classification of drugs known as benzodiazepines. In the United States, Rohypnol is not approved for usage. However in Europe, and over 60 other countries, it is commonly used as a sedative, treatment for insomnia, and an anesthetic.

Rohypnol is tasteless and odorless and until recent manufacturer efforts, dissolved clear in liquid, which masked its presence. Rohypnol comes in pill form and is usually sold in the manufacturer’s bubble packaging, which can mislead users in the United States into believing the drug is safe and legal. Since February 1999, reformulated Rohypnol tablets, which turn blue in a drink to increase visibility, have been approved and marketed in 20 countries. The old noncolored tablets are still available, however. In response to the reformulated blue tablets, people who intend to commit a sexual assault facilitated by Rohypnol are now serving blue tropical drinks and punches in which the blue dye can be disguised. The sedative effects are increased by the simultaneous use of alcohol. A dose of as low as 1 milligram can impair its user for up to 12 hours.

Rohypnol is taken orally, however people have been known to crush the tablets to be snorted. The drug can cause severe “anterograde amnesia.” The person that used the drug may not remember events that were experienced while under the influence of the substance. Rohypnol earned notoriety as a date-rape drug and its name “Forget-me Pill” due to this effect.

Other negative effects linked with Rohypnol include drowsiness, urinary retention, diminished blood pressure, visual disturbances, and gastrointestinal problems.
Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD)

Street Names: *Acid, Boomers, Yellow Sunshines*

LSD is a hallucinogen. It creates changes and abnormalities in sensory perceptions. The effects of LSD are often unpredictable. Environment, dosage, personality, mood, and other factors influence the action of the drug.

LSD is often taken orally. It is often sold in tablets, capsules, liquid, and in the form of pieces of blotter paper that have absorbed the drug.

The effects of LSD usually begin within 30 to 90 minutes after taking it. Initial effects include dilated pupils, increased body temperature, increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, sweating, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, dry mouth, and body tremors. LSD users have reported numbness, weakness, trembling, and nausea. LSD has also been associated with two chronic disorders, persistent psychosis and hallucinogen perception disorder (flashbacks.)

Recent studies indicate that LSD use has decreased significantly among 10th and 12th graders over the past few years. In 2003 according to the Monitoring the Future survey, past year use reached the lowest levels in the history of the survey.

Resources

- Club Drugs.org http://www.clubdrugs.org
- Drugstory.org-Club Drugs http://www.drugstory.org/drug_info/clubdrugs.asp
- NCADI Tips for Teens-Club Drugs http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/club/
- U.S. Department of Justice-Club Drugs http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/docs/clubdrug.pdf

References
