

Illicit drug use and awareness of health and policing initiatives at Australian music festivals among people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants

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The issue

There is significant concern about patron safety at music festivals, and particularly related to illicit drug use and associated harms^[1]. People who attend music festivals are more likely to report illicit drug use than the general population, and festivals may be higher risk environments for experience of drug-related harms^[2]. Various strategies have been implemented with the aim of maximising patron safety, including increased policing and health efforts^[2], however there has been limited research exploring patron awareness of these initiatives.

What our work found

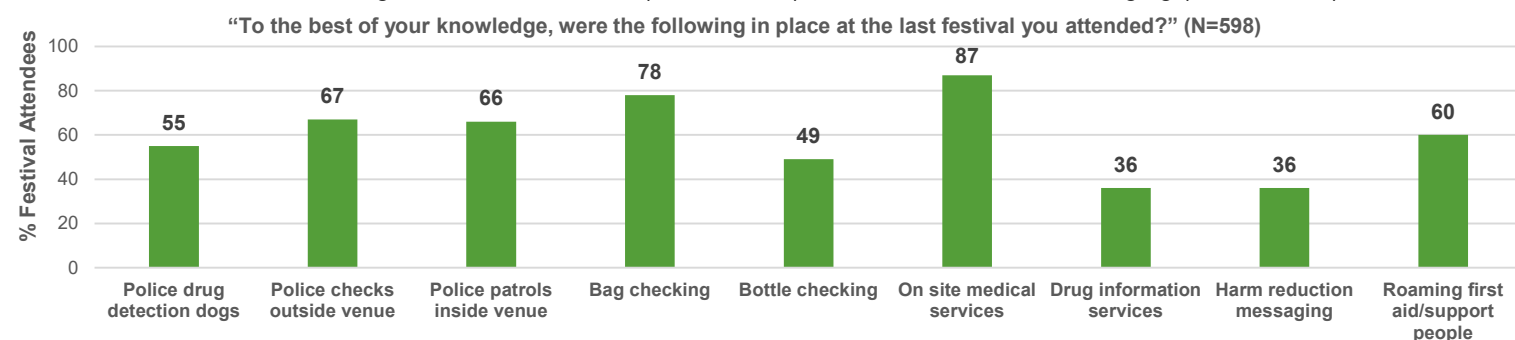
As part of the [Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System](#) (EDRS), we interviewed 796 people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited from capital cities in April-July 2019 about their experiences at Australian music festivals.

- Seven in ten (68%, n=538) of EDRS participants had attended an Australian music festival in the last year.
- Nearly all (97%, n=524) of those who had attended a festival had used any alcohol or drugs, and most (93%, n=498) had used illicit drugs (e.g., MDMA, cocaine, cannabis).
- Of the 498 people who had used illicit drugs at their last festival, one in twenty (5%, n=24) thought they needed medical help following their illicit use drug use, and 2% (n=10) sought medical help.

EDRS sample who attended a festival in the past year: "What substances did you use at the last festival?"	National (N=538)	NSW (N=82)	ACT (N=77)	VIC (N=69)	TAS (N=56)	SA (N=52)	WA (N=71)	NT (N=72)	QLD (N=59)
Any alcohol and/or other drug %	97	99	94	99	98	92	100	100	97
Any alcohol %	83	82	82	77	96	75	82	92	81
Any illicit drug %	93	90	88	97	91	85	97	99	91
Ecstasy/MDMA %	83	78	84	84	80	77	94	83	83
Cannabis %	41	34	36	45	63	23	34	40	58
Ketamine %	21	39	12	59	-	-	-	17	20
LSD %	21	27	14	35	23	14	16	15	24
Cocaine %	20	17	16	38	18	21	13	15	27

Note – small number suppressed. Use may have occurred immediately prior to or during the festival. Findings reported by jurisdiction of residence.

- Of those who attended a festival, most were aware of on-site medical services at their last festival (87%, n=468).
- Most were aware of bag checking (78%, n=419) and police patrols inside (66%, n=356) and outside (67%, n=359) venues.
- One-third were aware of drug information services (36%, n=193) and harm reduction messaging (36%, n=192).



Implications

Most EDRS participants who had attended a festival were aware of on-site medical services and of policing/security strategies like bag checking and patrolling police. A smaller proportion were aware of drug information and harm reduction services at festivals. Music festivals represent a unique setting to engage with people who may not otherwise come into contact with services offering harm reduction information and other health education. There is an opportunity to increase access to, and awareness of, these services at festivals.

References:

1. Hughes, C., et al. (2019). Australian music festival attendees: A national overview of demographics, drug use patterns, policing experiences and help seeking behaviour. *DPMP Bulletin No. 28*. NDARC: Sydney.
2. NSW Ministry of Health (2019). Guidelines for music festival events: Music festival harm reduction. NSW Ministry of Health: Sydney.

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