

GHB - Another "Date-Rape" Drug

Gamma Hydroxybutyrate Acid -- GHB. ON the streets it's known as liquid ecstasy, liquid X, G-riffic, Greavous Bodily Harm, easy-lay and cherry meth. In hosiptal rooms it's known as dangerous and sometimes deadly.

In the early 1980's, synthetic GHB was used in Europe as an anesthetic. Appearing on the U.S. market in haelth food stores, GHB was known as a natural supplement for athletes -- an alternative to anabolic steroids. By the early 1990's with more than 70 reports of users experiencing seizures and near coma, health officials sounded the alarm.

Michael Zawadzski, Demand Reduction Coordinator for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in Chicago said that "GHB is a powerful central nervous system depressant (that is) used for its ability to produce euphoric and hallucinatory states." Zawadzski continues, "GHB has been banned by the FDA since 1990 for medicinal uses except for FDA approved physician-supervised protocols." Dr. David Zull, associate professor of emergency medicine at Northwestern Memorial Hospital calls GHB "a profound anesthetic, especially taken with alcohol...someone could take out your appendix and you wouldn't even blink."

GHB emerged on the Chicago scene last June when "three patrons at Shelter were rendered unconscious after taking the drug." Later in July, "seven people passed out at Crobar after reportedly ingesting GHB." In January, 1997, three people in the Quad-Cities "completely stopped breathing and had to be put on mechanical respirators to save their lives." In early February, after ingesting GHB, three Massachusetts college students were hospitalized.

During 1996, GHB was named in at least three cases as the cause of death, including a Texas high school student who died after someone slipped the chemical into her soft drink at a dance club, and a Virginia woman, described to be in her 20's, who was thought to have been a drunk driver. However, autopsy reports showed "GHB instead of alcohol."

When Billy Idol collapsed last year early reports blamed "exhaustion." However, friends "close to his camp" named GHB as the source. And, when River Phoenix died in 1992 of a drug overdose, accounts of that night included witnesses reporting GHB being passed around the club.

Because of its potency and link to violent sexual assault, GHB has been labeled as a "date-rape drug." Women who consume GHB unwittingly pass out and become easy prey for rapists. They revive with little or no memory of what happened. IN October, Presdent Clinton signed a bill that adds 20 years in prison to the sentence of any rapist who uses GHB or other drugs to subdue a victim.

GHB is odorless and tasteless. It comes in both clear liquid form and white powder. When mixed with a liquid, it can barely be detected by the victim. The deadly effects of GHB can kill a person. REcent reports show that GHB is distributed in clear plastic bottles often used for drinking water. And, without immediate medical treatment, abusers can die.

Warnings

- Don't ever leave your drink unattended
- Don't accept a drink from a stranger
- Don't drink anything from a bottle that has been opened out of your sight
- If you become ill after drinking seek out a trusted friend for help. In some cases, strangers offering help have sexually assaulted women under the influence of the drug.

Symptoms

The symptoms of taking GHB, which is known on the streets as liquid ecstasy or scoop, are severe and quick. Here is what can happen when a person ingests the drug:

- Hallucinations and delirium
- Drowsiness, dizziness and euphoria
- Nausea and vomiting
- Urinary incontinence, difficulty breathing, uncontrollable shaking, seizure-like activity
- Profuse sweating is noted in some cases
- A coma lasting up to two hours, with full recovery by eight hours. Dizziness may linger for as long as two weeks
- There is no known antidote. Treatment can involve a respirator to aid breathing and pumping the patient's stomach

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