



GHB

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS GHB?

GHB is an illegal drug. It is a powerful central nervous system depressant. It usually comes in the form of a liquid, which is colourless or blue, slightly odourous and sometimes bitter or salty to the taste. It also comes in powder or pill form.

DOES GHB HAVE A LEGAL USE?

GHB was developed legally in the 1920s as an anaesthetic but was withdrawn because of unwanted side effects. It was also produced to treat insomnia and as a body building supplement. GHB is now illegally produced in 'backyard' laboratories and therefore the quality and purity is extremely unpredictable. It is made from products such as paint thinners, wood stripper and industrial solvents.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF TAKING GHB?

GHB's depressant effects on the brain cause drowsiness and dizziness and slows the heart rate with effects similar to alcohol intoxication. Other symptoms can include, nausea, vomiting, confusion, aggressive behaviour, depression, hallucinations, breathing difficulties, slurred speech and seizures. In higher doses and/or when mixed with alcohol, other depressants or opioids, the depressant effects rapidly increase and can last from 3 – 6 hours. This can lead to coma and even death.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON OR 'STREET NAMES' OF GHB?

There are at least 40 street names for GHB. The most common in Australia are: "G"; GBH (Grievous Bodily Harm); Fantasy; Liquid E; Gamma G and Blue Nitro (when coloured blue for easier identification).

IS GHB ADDICTIVE?

GHB can become addictive with regular use. People who use GHB daily can experience withdrawal symptoms including insomnia, tremors, agitation, anxiety and a rapid heart rate.

WHY IS GHB CONSIDERED MORE DANGEROUS THAN SOME OTHER PARTY DRUGS?

Any use of GHB has the potential to cause death. GHB is very dose dependent; a small increase in the dose – even half a teaspoon – can result in extremely debilitating symptoms such as vomiting, confusion, breathing difficulties and seizures. There is a fine line between the desired effect, overdose, coma and possibly death. The effects of GHB may not peak for up to 2 hours and overdose can occur when users take more GHB believing the first dose has had little effect. The risk of GHB overdose is significantly increased when taken with other depressants such as alcohol or opioids.

HOW DO I TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOMEONE WHO HAS OVERDOSED ON GHB AND SOMEONE WHO IS INTOXICATED ON ALCOHOL?

Initial symptoms of GHB use are similar to that of alcohol intoxication; slurred speech, lack of coordination, nausea and vomiting. GHB intoxication symptoms progress much more rapidly than with alcohol. Someone experiencing overdose may decline rapidly and experience breathing difficulties. Breathing may slow to around 6 breaths a minute. Any person who is unconscious and cannot be roused is likely to have overdosed on GHB or another drug.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF A PATRON APPEARS TO HAVE OVERDOSED ON GHB OR ANOTHER ILLICIT DRUG?

A GHB overdose is a medical emergency and some will die without medical intervention. If you suspect someone has overdosed, check to see if they are breathing, put them on their side and gently tilt their head back to open their windpipe. Call an ambulance immediately (dial 000) and follow the operator's instructions. The patient should be made as comfortable as possible, preferably by a qualified medical or first aid person, until para-medics arrive.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF A PATRON (OR THEIR FRIENDS) REFUSES TO ACCEPT MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FOR A SUSPECTED DRUG OVERDOSE?

Venue owners and managers have a duty of care to minimise any health risks to patrons. Persons who are suspected of having overdosed, and their friends, should be advised that paramedic's need to be called to assess the health of the person considered at risk, but also reassured that details about paramedic care and treatment will remain confidential.

IS GHB ONE OF THE DRUGS USED TO SPIKE DRINKS?

GHB is one of the drugs associated with 'date rape' as it can be added to another person's drink without them knowing or detecting the taste. Any person who believes they have had their drink spiked, should seek medical assistance.

IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO PREVENT GHB AND OTHER ILLICIT DRUG USE ON THE PREMISES?

Venue owners can introduce a written policy on illicit drug use and display it at strategic points in the venue such as the entrance, foyer and toilet walls. Signage can include that searching patrons may be a condition of entry and also that police will be contacted if any person is found in possession of illicit drugs whilst on the premises. Venue operators can also display posters and signs on the risks associated with GHB use. Talk to your local licensing police for further advice.

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD I PROVIDE TO MY STAFF SO THAT THEY RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO GHB OR OTHER DRUG USE OR OVERDOSE?

All staff should be aware of any written policy the venue has introduced and that venue operators and staff are legally obligated to fulfil their 'duty of care' to patrons by providing a safe environment. Legal action can be taken if they fail to do so. Staff should be aware of first-aid management of an overdose emergency. Staff should also be made aware of the Government's campaign to prevent GHB use. Further details and copies of the posters are available at: www.health.vic.gov.au/drugs

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS A LICENSEE IN REGARD TO DRUGS ON LICENSED PREMISES?

Owners and operators of licensed premises should be mindful that they have a legal and community responsibility to do everything they can to prevent illicit drug use or trafficking on their premises. Drug involvement has serious implications for venue operators as they may be found unsuitable to hold a liquor licence. For further advice on laws and licensing, talk to your local licensing police.

WHERE ELSE CAN I GET INFORMATION ON GHB OR OTHER ILLICIT DRUGS?

Information on GHB or other illicit drug misuse is available from: DirectLine Alcohol and Drug Counselling and Referral Line 1800 888 236; The Australian Drug Foundation Drug Info Line 1300 85 85 84; The Victorian Drug User Group (VIVAIDS) 9419 3633; and Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) House 9347 3066.

The Code of practice for running safer dance parties is available at: www.health.vic.gov.au/drugservice/pubs/index.htm