

WHAT IS A DRUG CHECKING?

Drug checking (also known as pill testing) is an evidence-informed harm reduction tool, that allows people who use drugs to help identify the substance they intend to take, and to make more informed and safer decisions about their consumption. It does not promote illicit drug use or claim that illicit drug use is safe.

BENEFITS OF DRUG CHECKING



OUTREACH

Gives service providers the opportunity to share harm reduction information with people who use drugs and occasional drug users.

MONITORING

Public health practitioners can detect and report dangerous contaminants to a wide audience, i.e. through alerts, warning campaigns, online information and so on.



RAISING AWARENESS & KNOWLEDGE

Drug checking services not only inform about potential risks and harms of use, but also enable people who choose to use drugs to make informed choices. If drugs are shown to contain unwanted or unknown chemical compounds, people might decide not to use them at all.

CONNECTIONS

Honest conversation about risks related to drug use can create positive relationships with staff and boost client referrals to other services and support programs (if needed)



SUPPLY CHANGE

Research shows that drug checking influences the unregulated market, with supply chains matching client expectations more closely over time.

Developed by:



KNOW YOUR STUFF



HOW TO TEST A SUBSTANCE?



Crack open the ampoule

Insert a small amount of the sample

Put the plastic lid on & shake well

Compare the colour change to the chart

GOOD TO KNOW:

- If the reagent test does not change colour – it means that tested sample does not contain any substances indicated in the colour chart.
- If the colour is vague or different from any shown on the colour chart, then the sample is quite often a combination of substances for which the test can check, or a substance the test cannot reveal.
- In the case of a mixed sample (e.g. MDMA with mCPP) a reaction will take place although the results will be uncertain, and a clear result is unlikely.
- For many drugs belonging to the same family, the test will show almost identical color change. There is currently no chemical test available capable of distinguishing MDMA from MDA/MDEA or amphetamine from methamphetamine.

REAGENT TEST KITS

Reagent test kits are chemicals that change colour when a drug is added. The colour change can then be compared to a reference table to work out if the sample is what it is supposed to be. Reagent test kits are ONLY ABLE to detect the presence of a drug, NOT the quantity or purity. In each substance there can be other substances, that are not detected by test. No drug is completely safe.

EXAMPLE – ECSTAZY TEST (MARQUIS TEST)

This test identifies the presence of ecstasy in the tested substance. The Marquis test will turn a different colour for any of the Ecstasy-like substances DXM, 2C-B/C/I, (met)amphetamine, methylone, butylone.

	ECSTASY
	(METH)AMPHETAMINE
	2C-B/C/I
	DXM
	METHYLONE, BUTYLONE

DRUG CHECKING METHODS

Numerous drug checking methods exist in the world and each of them has their own specifics. In the table you can see few of the methods and their differences/similarities.

Colormetric reagents	High-performance liquid chromatography	Gas chromatography	Mass spectrometry	TECHNIQUE
By hour		By days		TIMING
Presence or absence of a component	Information on whole range of substance present	Quantitative information about all compounds		TESTING FOR
At home	On-site/mobile	Remote site		SETTING
Individuals	Professionals			WHO
Drug content	Public health alerts	Harm reduction information	Brief interventions	RESULTS
Individual harm reduction	Public health action	Market monitoring		USE OF RESULTS

Resource: EMCDDA, Drug checking as a harm reduction tool for recreational drug users: opportunities and challenges.

SAFETY TIPS FOR FESTIVAL GOERS

BEFORE USING:

- Eat and stay hydrated.
- Be cautious if you are offered drugs or other substances.
- Know your dealer. Keep in mind that even your dealer may not know where the drug came from or its ingredients.
- Do some research on substances before trying them.
- Plan ahead. Plan your drug use rather than using on impulse.

IF YOU ARE USING:

- Go slow. Take a small amount and wait to see what effect it has on you.
- Don't use alone. Be sure you are with people you trust, and who know what to do in an emergency.
- How you use the drug changes the strength or potency. Smoking, injecting, snorting, and inhaling act quickly while swallowing, eating, or drinking act slowly and can lead to an accidental overdose.
- Watch how other people behave but remember that not everyone responds in the same way.
- Use in moderation. Use a reasonable amount. Don't binge use.
- Don't share needles, pipes or any other equipment with anyone.
- Don't drive while under the influence.
- Don't mix. Avoid using different substances (including alcohol) at the same time.
- If you take antidepressants and MDMA at the same time, it can cause serotonin syndrome. The signs of serotonin syndrome include very high fever, sickness, dangerously high blood pressure, heart problems and can result in death.
- Take a break once in a while from your drug use. If you decide to take a longer break, be mindful that your tolerance level to the drug you used may change, and that you may not need to take as much to get the same effect.
- Talk to someone you trust. It can be helpful to talk about what you're feeling with a friend, family member, peer to peer consultant.

Use of drugs is associated with risks – but there are ways to make it safer.