Recreational Drug Use Trends and Emerging Analytes Identified in Blood, Urine, and/or Oral Fluid from Attendees at an Electronic Dance Music Festival

Amanda L.A. Mohr1, Jillian K. Yeakel2, Melissa Friscia1, Barry K. Logan3

1The Center for Forensic Science Research and Education, Willow Grove, PA 2Lehigh Valley Toxicology, Bethlehem, PA 3NMS Labs, Willow Grove, PA

Introduction

Electronic Dance Music (EDM) is a popular music genre in Europe and the United States and has a strong association with various types of drug use, especially novel psychoactive substances (NPS), which is documented by surveys with EDM attendees and in online discussion groups associated with EDM culture. EDM festivals within the United States have recently been a focus of media attention due to drug-related deaths and mass hospitalizations or medical aid calls, which have caused cancellations of the events. The use of these novel and potentially toxic drugs within these venues makes EDM festivals an important site to collect information regarding recreational drug use and potentially characterize emerging analytes. This project was designed to obtain information regarding what new drugs are on the market, their prevalence, identification of their metabolites, and correlations between their presence in blood, urine and oral fluid specimens, allowing insight into patterns of use within the United States.

Methods

Participants were verbally recruited during an EDM festival in Florida during the Spring of 2014. Potential participants were approached on their way to the festival and given a brief overview of the project. After obtaining informed consent, participants were asked questions regarding their prescription and recreational drug use history within the last week and were offered a $20.00 gift card. Each participant was given a unique identification number that linked the samples and survey information to one another, but not to a specific individual in order to protect each participants anonymity.

Demographic and Survey Data

- 76 males, 60 females (9 did not indicate M/F)
- Average Age: 23.7 (±6.4)
- Age Range: 18-57 years old
- Total number of subjects: 145
- Number of Urine Samples: 105
- Number of Blood Samples: 65
- Number of Oral Fluid Samples: 125

Samples were screened with the Alere™ DDS2® Mobile System Oral Fluid Field Test

- 125 oral fluid samples were screened on-site after participants had left the study area
- Device screens for common drugs of abuse

Blood Sample Analysis and Results

- 66 blood samples were screened using Waters ACQUITY UPLC® I Class Waters Xevo® G2-S QTOF using a basic liquid liquid extraction
- 73% (48 subjects) of the blood samples screened positive for a common drug of abuse/metabolite or NPS
- Of the 16 subjects screening positive for an NPS, 75% confirmed positive for at least one NPS

Urine Sample Analysis and Results

- 105 urine samples were screened via several analytical techniques including: Immunossay, GC-MS, LC-QTOF, and RapidFire tandem mass spectrometry
- 35% of the urine samples confirmed positive for one or more drugs
- 33% of the urine samples confirmed positive for an NPS

Blood and urine samples collected demonstrated high levels of NPS use among this population of EDM festival attendees. Next to THC, the next highest class of drugs used medicinal or recreational drugs within the last week, 29% had reported taking MDMA, Ecstasy, or “Molly”. None of the participants reported taking alpha-PVP, however, alpha-PVP was detected in samples from individuals who admitted to taking “Molly” and MDMA. Samples from subjects admitting “Molly” use contained: MDMA, alpha-PVP, methylone, ethylone, or butylone. Samples from subjects admitting MDMA use contained: MDMA, alpha-PVP, methylone, dimethylone, ethylone.

Conclusion

Paired blood, urine and oral fluid samples were collected from 145 participants attending an EDM festival. Seventy-two percent of participants had indicated they had used medicinal or recreational drugs within the last week with the most common response being THC (57%). Several participants also indicated the use of NPS drugs like “Molly” (14%) and traditional party drugs like MDMA (13%). Blood and urine samples collected demonstrated high levels of NPS use among this population of EDM festival attendees. Next to THC, the next highest class of drugs confirmed in both blood and urine samples was NPS. In terms of NPS use, participants reported taking MDMA or “Molly,” however these subjects samples often contained NPS drugs like alpha-PVP or methylone. Many of the participants are unknowingly ingesting highly potent substances with severe adverse effects, which creates a significant public health concern. Additionally, the majority of subjects who test positive for drug use are poly-drug cases increasing the likelihood of having an adverse event associated with drug use.

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