

# GHB

## G<sub>HB</sub>

or gamma hydroxybutyrate, also called Liquid Ecstasy, Liquid X, Liquid E, Goop, GBH or Grievous Bodily Harm) was originally produced as an anaesthetic. Possession of GHB is currently prohibited in Canada due to its limited analgesic effect and association with serious seizures. GHB is used recreationally for its hallucinogenic and euphoric effects. It is also reportedly used to promote muscle development, although the actual effectiveness of the drug for this purpose is not documented.

## U<sub>se</sub>

The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey began asking students about past year use of GHB in 2001. In 2003, 1% of Toronto students reported use of GHB in the past year. Use has not changed since 2001 when it was also at 1%.

GHB use has reportedly declined significantly in the dance club community. While GHB was, in past years, a primary drug of choice in this population, a large number of hospital emergency department visits by those under the influence of this drug has, anecdotally, caused this decrease in use.

The dangers of GHB include loss of consciousness, coma or death. The fact that this so-called designer drug is generally "manufactured" in clandestine labs means dosage is subject to dangerous fluctuations. Hospital emergency department staff report overdoses more frequently linked to GHB than Ecstasy, but testing is not uniformly conducted.<sup>12,13</sup>

Reports from the gay community in Toronto indicate, however, that GHB remains popular in clubs frequented by this latter group.<sup>14,54</sup>

## E<sub>nforcement Data</sub>

In 2003, there were 15 seizures of GHB in Toronto, with about 1.6 kg seized (data not tabled). Both the number of GHB seizures and the quantity seized have declined over recent years (in 2000: 26

seizures, 2.5 kg; in 2001: 30 seizures, 9.2 kg). In 2003, GHB seizures accounted for 3% of all drug seizures in Toronto.

## T<sub>reatment Data</sub>

Data regarding GHB-related problems are not currently available, although discussions with drug counsellors and other professionals indicate anecdotally that they have received inquiries related to GHB addiction.

There is a debate in the current medical literature regarding the use of the drug physostigmine in treating GHB overdose.<sup>43,58</sup> This drug has been used in the past to reverse the effects of GHB anaesthesia used in surgery.

## D<sub>rug-Related Deaths</sub>

Three GHB-related deaths were recorded in Ontario between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 2002<sup>15</sup>

*"GHB is produced in clandestine lab operations and requires no scientific expertise or laboratory skills. GHB is produced by the addition of sodium hydroxide to gamma-butyrolactone (GBL). GBL is an industrial solvent quite often used as a floor cleaner and is readily available throughout Canada at most chemical distributors. Sodium hydroxide is, quite simply, lye. Lye can be purchased at most grocery stores in the same aisle as other "cleaning products." When these two benign products are mixed together in proper proportions, they form GHB...These chemicals are usually mixed in any glass container without heat or additional chemicals.*

*It is the lack of lab equipment and specialized precursors that make these labs so difficult to uncover, and allows the "cooks" to set up shop anywhere...Even though it is a simple process, the two precursor chemicals are hazardous and should be treated with the same caution used in handling hazardous materials from more sophisticated clandestine lab operations."<sup>10</sup>*

**From Rintoul, Scott and Kristy McKillian (2001), "Designer Drugs and Raves", Second Edition, RCMP Drug Awareness Service.**