



2019

DRUG RELATED FESTIVAL DEATHS: DO WE HAVE A SOLUTION?



The International Institute of Live Events



Electronic Dance Music

Electronic Dance Music (EDM) has a direct historical link to Acid House music and those events/festivals that appeared in the 80s and early 90s across the UK. The rebirth of this music style is now known as EDM, repacked and popular again outside of the UK.

Acid House in the UK was synonymous with the illegal drugs known as 'ecstasy' or MDMA its chemical abbreviated name.

The zero tolerance and drug amnesty bins at UK festivals for many years have had a limited impact on the consumption of illegal drugs. So, the question many are asking, do people need to die at music festivals as a direct consumption of illegal drug?

The European festival organisers adopted drug testing before any festival in the UK.



Drug testing

In 2017 at least 6 UK music festivals rolled out a process of drug testing, this is on the back of several drug related deaths at festivals over the previous three years. It's not the first time this process was used at UK festivals, but it comes on the back of several deaths at UK festivals in 2015. This process of illegal drug testing can only take place with the support of each regional police force responsible for public order in their locality.

An organisation called the 'Loop' delivered this service at some festivals in the UK. Attendees can have their drug tested to determine the content and be informed before consuming or discarding the substance.

It was reported by the BBC, the Secret Garden Party had more than 200 festival attendees using the service over the weekend in 2017 and the first UK music festival to undertake drug testing for attendees.

An international dance music (EDM) in Hanoi Vietnam 2018 saw the largest number of drug related deaths in the world thus far. It was reported, the seven festival attendees in their 20s died from an illegal drug. This resulted in the authorities banning all EDM festivals in the city. This shut down is on the back of another death at an EDM festival in Australia, one day before the seven deaths in Hanoi Trip to the Moon festival.

95%

of festival-goers support the introduction of drug safety testing facilities

97%

of those who use drugs say they would consider using the facilities themselves, if available

Royal Society of Public Health (2017)



Where are we now?



ONE MAY BEGIN TO CONCLUDE, THE DEATHS AT A PARTICULAR TYPE OF FESTIVAL ACROSS THE WORLD COULD BE SEEN AS A PROBLEM FOR EDM MUSIC FESTIVALS.

Let us be clear, death due to the illegal consumption of drugs is a problem for all music festivals, however EDM has seen a greater number in recent years. Some of these festivals in the USA (Electric Daisy Carnival) have an attendance figure of 400,000 and the EDM industry is valued at \$6.2 Billion. For anyone who plans, manages or attends music festivals and in particular EDM events shouldn't be surprised about the high level of illegal drug taking.

On the 28th October 2018 a debate was held in Westminster Hall, ahead of this debate a report was published by the House of Commons, titled 'Drug Policy'. The debate is a direct result of the many deaths at music festivals due to illegal drug taking.

This discussion must take into account the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, this legislation categorises the type of illegal drugs and the criminal sentence that accompany each drug if a person is charged and convicted.

It also legislates against production, supply and possession of illegal drugs. Along side this legislation the UK also has the Misuse of Drugs Regulation 2001.

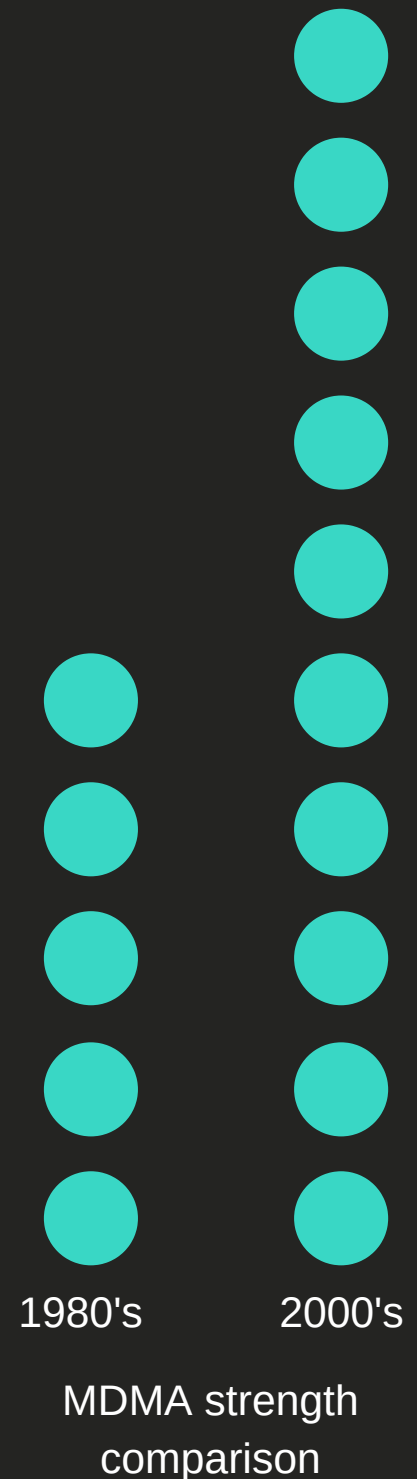
In 2016 the UK brought in the Psychoactive Substance Act, a legislation to plug the gap on drugs known as 'legal highs'.



Where are we now?

A great deal of the data published in the House of Commons report was taken from the Office of the National Statistics. As good as this data maybe, it gives the trends and statistics of all forms of drug related deaths in the UK as far back as 2012. What it doesn't give, is a break-down of those deaths related to a particular type of sector or entertainment activity. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if decisions enacted as a result of the data in the drug report, may not reflect the seriousness of the problem or deliver the appropriate response to this issue.

In the UK, it was reported that cocaine related deaths in 2011 was 112 in 2016 in was 371. In recent years the number of people taking illegal drugs has remained stable, it's the strength of the substance (MDMA) that has caused the increase in deaths at music festivals and across the UK. In the 80s the active ingredient MDMA was 50 – 80 mg, in recent years, pills tested had in the region 200 – 270 mg of MDMA.





Is there a solution?



The most ubiquitous festival drug is alcohol, with 5,507 deaths across the UK in 2016/17 with over 300,000 hospital admissions in 2016. Public safety at festivals, fall directly with the festival organiser/festival licensee, it is that person's overall responsibility to ensure a safe event.

This can only be undertaken when working with a number of external agencies; it is therefore a national if not global debate that is required within the event industry and in particular for festival managers. Without this open and transparent discussion, it is difficult to disseminate accurate and specific solution that reflects the problem and give guidance to eradicate/minimise drug related festival deaths.

About The International Institute of Live Events

The International Institute of Live Events came into formation to produce industry ready online courses in live events. With a vision and mission to incapsulate education with the commercial world of live events. The IIOLE is created by accomplished academics and practitioners who have published extensively within the field of live events management.

They have an unprecedented and accumulative experience as practitioners and educators in live events that spans 80 years. The first online course in Events Management will go live in August 2019. We will keep you posted.....

