

Rohypnol and GHB

Rohypnol _____

Rohypnol, the trade name for flunitrazepam, has been a concern for the last few years because of its abuse as a "date rape" drug. People may unknowingly be given the drug which, when mixed with alcohol, can incapacitate victims and prevent them from resisting sexual assault. Also, Rohypnol can be lethal when mixed with alcohol and/or other depressants.

Rohypnol produces sedative-hypnotic effects including muscle relaxation and amnesia; it can also produce dependence. Rohypnol is not approved for use in the United States and its importation is banned. Illicit use of Rohypnol began in Europe in the 1970s and started appearing in the United States in the early 1990s, where it became known as "rophies," "roofies," "roach," "rope," and the "date rape" drug.

Another very similar drug is clonazepam, marketed in the U.S. as Klonopin and in Mexico as Rivotril. It is sometimes abused to enhance the effects of heroin and other opiates.

GHB _____

Since about 1990, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) has been abused in the U.S. for euphoric, sedative, and anabolic (body-building) effects. GHB use associated with sexual assault has surpassed Rohypnol use associated with sexual assault.¹

Coma and seizures can occur following abuse of GHB and, when combined with methamphetamine, there appears to be an increased risk of seizure. Combining use with other drugs such as alcohol can result in nausea and difficulty breathing. GHB may also produce withdrawal effects, including insomnia, anxiety, tremors, and sweating. Because of concern about Rohypnol, GHB, and other similarly abused sedative-hypnotics, Congress passed the "Drug-Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996" in October 1996. This legislation increased Federal penalties for use of *any* controlled substance to aid in sexual assault.

Extent of Use

According to the 2002 Monitoring the future (MTF), NIDA's nationwide annual survey of drug use among the Nation's high school students, 0.3 percent of 8th-graders, 0.7 percent of 10th-graders, and 1.6 percent of 12th-graders used Rohypnol in the 12 months prior to the survey.²

Use of GHB by high school students during the past year remained relatively stable from 2001 to 2002, according to MTF findings. In 2002, 0.8 percent of 8th-graders, 1.4 percent of 10th-graders, and 1.5 percent of 12th-graders reported using the drug in the 12 months leading up to the survey.³ Hospital emergency

department (ED) episodes involving GHB rose from 55 in 1994 to 4,969 in 2000, then declined in 2001 to 3,340. Among ED mentions involving club drugs, however, only MDMA (ecstasy) is cited more frequently than GHB.⁴

Other Information Sources

For additional information on Rohypnol and GHB, please also see the NIDA InfoFacts on Club Drugs and visit www.clubdrugs.org.

For additional information on findings from the Community Epidemiological Work Group, please also see the NIDA InfoFacts on Nationwide Trends.

¹ This information is from the latest published proceedings of NIDA's Community Epidemiology Work Group (CEWG). The information covers current and emerging trends in drug abuse for 21 major U.S. metropolitan areas, as shared at CEWG's June 2002 meeting.

² Conducted annually since 1975, MTF assesses drug use and attitudes among 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders, college students, and young adults nationwide. The survey is conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research and is funded by NIDA. Copies of the latest published survey may be downloaded from www.monitoringthefuture.org.

³ Ibid ref. 2.

⁴ Emergency department data are from the annual Drug Abuse Warning Network, funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, DHHS. The survey provides information about emergency department visits that are induced by or related to the use of an illicit drug or the nonmedical use of a legal drug. The latest annual data (2001) are available at 1-800-729-6686 or online at www.samhsa.gov.