

News Release ... June 2004

What's In A Drink?

Binge drinking, no water and spiked drinks a deadly cocktail – Drug Action Week told

Binge drinking, a lack of available water at licensed clubs, hotels and dance venues and the risk of having drinks spiked with extra alcohol or other substances, are placing young Victorians at high risk and increasing their chances of risky behaviors, unplanned sex, assault and other injuries.

The Director of Turning Point's Alcohol & Drug Centre, Professor Margaret Hamilton, said young people were at risk when socializing because of a 'cocktail of circumstances' that may not be totally within their control.

Prof Hamilton, who will be speaking during Drug Action Week (starting June 21 2004), said Turning Point research showed that almost 50 per cent of Victorians aged between 18 and 24 years binge drink at least once a month, placing them at risk of acute harm such as being involved in sex that they later regret, violent incidents, falls and accidents.

The binge drinking survey, published in the Victorian Alcohol Statistics Handbook (Volume 4) found that:

- 18 per cent of people in the 18-24 age group drink in a risky* way at least once a week.
- 21% per cent of people over 18 years drink in a risky way at least once a month.
- 49% per cent of people in the 18-24 age group drink in a risky way at least once a month.
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The Manager of Turning Point's DirectLine counseling service, Mr Eric Tyssen, said it was apparent that more and more teenagers were concerned about the effects of binge drinking and their safety when out drinking. They were also concerned about the risk, albeit low, of drink spiking, and the lack of available water when needed. A number of young people have complained to DirectLine about licensed premises that only sell-water at a very high cost and in some cases have removed the cold water taps from the bathroom facilities, forcing patrons to pay for the water or encouraging them to drink alcohol instead of water.

Last year the Victorian Government, in collaboration with the Nightclub Owners Association, Australian Hotels Association and Restaurant and Catering Victoria,

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released the *Voluntary guidelines to provide free or low-cost drinking water on licensed premises*. The guidelines, though voluntary, require operators and owners of licensed premises to provide water for free or cheaper than the cheapest alcoholic or non-alcoholic drink sold on the premises. It also states that cold running water should be available in bathrooms.

Calls to DirectLine from patrons indicate that there is still a level of community concern around compliance with the new guidelines. These calls about access to free or low cost water in licensed venues are collated by DirectLine and provided to the Department of Human Services for follow-up.

Prof Hamilton said there were several things young drinkers could do to reduce their risks when out having fun, including:

- Consume food, not just alcohol
- Choose drinks that are single alcohol shots
- Be aware that some cocktails actually contain three standard drinks in one – they are sweet and very easy to drink fast
- If you are going to drink, do it in a safe place and avoid risky situations (driving or being driven by another drinker).

“Another important aspect is water. We suggest drinkers alternate alcoholic drinks with water to try and slow down consumption. We know that dehydration is often associated with the consumption of alcohol and some illicit drugs, particularly party drugs, so the provision of water at licensed premises can be a life-saver for some young drinkers who are very vulnerable,” Prof Hamilton said.

Prof Hamilton urged young people to call the confidential 24/7 DirectLine service on 1800 888 236 to report any concerns around potential breaches to the guidelines.

“Because alcohol is a legal drug we forget the huge health risks involved. It is important to remember that alcohol was responsible for 14.5% of all drug deaths in Victoria in 2002 and illicit drugs caused 2.1% of the deaths,” she said.

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MEDIA

For information, or to arrange an interview contact Margaret Hamilton or Janeen Lynch on 03 8413 8413.