

A Different Kind of Drug Cocktail . . .

Recent studies suggest risk behaviors among gay men are on the rise after years of decline. The reasons for this revival of risk-behaviors are many, but one consideration that is receiving more and more attention is the relatively new phenomena of "circuit parties." Typically held in resort towns and major cities, circuit parties are often weekend-long event that can attract thousands of gay men to dance, socialize and celebrate.

Good time circuit parties also have their darker side, when they serve up the toxic cocktail of excessive alcohol and drug use along with sexual risk-taking behaviors.

In a 1999 survey of 295 gay men who attended a circuit party in the pervious year, 25 percent reported a drug or alcohol "overuse" in which they passed out, required medical attention or were unable to care for themselves. 80 percent of respondents reported using a psychoactive drug during their most recent circuit party, and 53 percent reported using four or more drugs.

Another recent trend among circuit partygoers is the use of Viagra as a recreational drug, both taken alone and in combination with Ecstasy and other drugs. A particularly dangerous combination is the use of Viagra and "poppers," a nitrate-based liquid drug that many gay and bisexual men inhale during sex to relax their bodies and heighten sensation. Both Viagra and nitrates cause blood vessels to dilate, and combining them can cause dizziness, stroke or heart attacks. Deaths have been reported. Recent studies also find that gay and bisexual men who use Viagra recreationally have more sexual partners and are more likely to engage in sex without a condom, placing them at heightened risk of HIV exposure.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cite alcohol and other drug abuse as the leading risk factor associated with HIV transmission in the United States today. A 1999 study by the Minnesota HIV Services Planning Council reported that two-thirds of people living with HIV in Minnesota consider alcohol or drug abuse to be a factor in their infection. Whether it's the traveling circuit party or the one every weekend at the bar, give it a second thought before ordering up the "toxic cocktail" of excessive alcohol, drugs and sexual risk taking.

PrideAlive is hosting a May 26 community forum "Rolling with the Homos" on gay party culture. This all-gender forum will be at Park House, 2120 Park Avenue in Minneapolis, at 7 p.m. Also, younger guys might want to check out the PrideAlive Liquid Discourse on June 26 discussing the topics of clubs, raves and circuit parties. For details, visit www.pridealive.org.

For more information about club drugs and how they affect those who take them, please visit www.dancesafe.org or www.erowid.org.