

Pill testing won't give people a 'green light' to use drugs

8 March 2021



Credit: Altin Ferreira on Unsplash

New research from Edith Cowan University (ECU) has found pill-testing services at Western Australian music festivals would not change people's intention to take ecstasy if they had not used the drug before, a common argument used by opponents of pill testing.

The study also found people who planned to take ecstasy at the [festival](#) reported they would not consume more drugs if a pill testing [service](#) were available at the festival.

The paper, published in *Drug and Alcohol Review*, surveyed 247 people at a WA music festival on whether having their drugs checked by an on-site pill testing would give them the 'green light' to use ecstasy.

One of the main arguments against pill-testing at music festivals is that it sends the wrong message to people and gives them permission to take drugs.

Overturning pill testing criticisms

Results showed there was no change in participants' intention to use ecstasy, whether they had used it before or not, in three hypothetical scenarios related to pill-testing services being available or not at a music festival.

Lead researcher from ECU Dr. Stephen Bright said there have only been two trials of pill testing at music festivals in Australia and while the results of this survey were positive, more work needed to be done before they were rolled out in Western Australia.

"Our study showed the biggest influence on a person's intention to use a pill testing service at a festival was how it was viewed among their friendship group," he said.

Dr. Bright expressed concern that unlike other states, WA did not have peer-based harm reduction groups that are able to positively influence people's attitudes towards pill testing and other harm reduction measures.

"It would be a shame to trial pill testing in WA and not have anybody use it," he said.

Dr. Bright is calling on the WA government to fund similar services to those funded in other states.

The low down on pill testing

Pill testing has been promoted as a harm minimisation strategy for [drug use](#) among young people at [music](#) festivals for over a decade in Australia and has been trialed twice at ACT festivals in recent years.

The ACT is even planning on rolling out a fixed site service where people will be able to get their drugs checked during business hours.

Dr. Bright's research found that when participants were asked if they would use a similar service in Northbridge, unlike on-site pill testing services at the festival, people did not care as much about what their friends thought.

"A fixed site drug checking service might be more successful here until we have peer-based harm reduction services funded by the WA government," he said.

Advocates of pill testing services say they give people who're already planning on taking illicit drugs more information about what is actually in what they're about to take as well as an opportunity to provide support and information about testing.

Research from Europe has shown 50 percent of those who had their drugs tested said the results affected their consumption choices. Two-thirds said they wouldn't consume the drug and would warn friends in cases of negative results.

Previous research from ECU has found that [pill](#)-testing services at [music festivals](#) could be the most effective method of reducing harm for first time ecstasy users.

The current study, "Could a [drug](#)-checking service increase intention to use ecstasy at a festival?" was published in *Drug and Alcohol Review*.

More information: Sherri Murphy et al. Could a drug?checking service increase intention to use ecstasy at a festival?, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.13259](https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13259)

Provided by Edith Cowan University

APA citation: Pill testing won't give people a 'green light' to use drugs (2021, March 8) retrieved 14 July 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-pill-wont-people-green-drugs.html>

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