

# It's official: high potency ecstasy makes a comeback

## EXCLUSIVE

Max Daly

- Return of £10, MDMA pills
- Ketamine stimulant "drug of choice" at festival
- Liquid LSD moves onto the scene

Old school ecstasy pills containing MDMA are back, according to an analysis of pills recovered by police at Glastonbury Festival.

The findings from Glastonbury come at the same time a Scottish drug charity issued a warning that original strength ecstasy pills were being sold in Edinburgh.

Avon and Somerset force drug strategy manager Paul Bunt said that evidence from drug arrests, seizures, body searches and amnesty bins at Glastonbury showed that most of the ecstasy pills recovered, in 25 separate seizures, contained high levels of MDMA more common in pills made in the 1980s and 1990s. "It is rare these days to get ecstasy pills that contain MDMA, but this year we were surprised because most of the pills did," Bunt said.

The findings back up mounting anecdotal evidence from around the UK that an increasing number of high strength ecstasy pills are being traded for prices around five times above the average – up from £2.50 a pill to between £10-£15. Users have reported they only require one or two pills to stay up all night, rather than having to take the usual 6-10.

John Arthur, director of Edinburgh drug charity Crew2000 has issued a warning to pill users about the new wave of high strength pills. He told *Druglink*: "We have seen people dropping a number of pills and ending up freaking out. For some people it's their first real ecstasy as they have been used to pills made from BZP and caffeine, they are not used to the real thing. We had some analysis done which proved many of

Encore: Tests at Glastonbury show old school ecstasy pills are back



these pills contain MDMA – which we have not seen for some time."

Until now, forensic experts have charted a gradual reduction in the amount of pills, sold as 'ecstasy', that contain MDMA. Instead they have contained a mix of caffeine, BZP, (a synthetic stimulant derived from piperazine), amphetamine and inert substances. It is thought that the scarcity of MDMA on the global stage may have been as a result of a seizure of 33 tonnes of sassafras oil, the key ingredient in ecstasy, in Cambodia in 2008. The rise in popularity of the former 'legal high' stimulant drugs mephedrone was largely triggered by the drop in quality of ecstasy, as well as cocaine.

Police at Glastonbury said that the most popular stimulant drug was not ecstasy, mephedrone or cocaine, but the hallucinogenic anaesthetic drug ketamine. As well as finding the drug in scores of amnesty bins – placed by entrances to give ticket holders the chance to get rid of their stash before being searched – police made 80 seizures of ketamine totalling 500 grams. Crystal MDMA was the second most popular stimulant drug at the festival. The majority of cocaine discovered was of a very low quality. There was a total of two kilos of cannabis found.

Police were also surprised to find that liquid LSD had moved onto the Glastonbury scene. The drug, more commonly seen in micro-dot blotter form, came in a semi-clear light brown solution contained in eye drop bottles. Some of the liquid LSD found also contained liquid ketamine. Liquid BZP, in the form of a pink solution in small phials, was also found.

Bunt said this year there had been no drug-related deaths, no serious drug-related illnesses, although two festival goers were hospitalised as a result of their drugs use, including one person who stabbed himself after taking drugs.

Avon and Somerset's drug policing strategy for the festival is very much seen as a 'softly softly' approach, based on identifying drugs on entry, the use of amnesty bins and a desire to concentrate efforts on drug dealers, not drug users. As result, the number of arrests at Glastonbury are proportionally far lower than they are at other festivals, where police may opt for more aggressive anti-drug tactics. Police made 110 drug-related arrests and made 470 drug seizures during the four day festival, which attracts 175,000 people a year. In contrast the Kendal Calling festival, with 8,000 visitors, last year resulted in 85 arrests.