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Drug checking services at music festivals and events in a Canadian setting

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Abstract

Objectives: Drug checking is a harm reduction intervention that allows for identification of drug composition. The objective of the study was to assess drug market components and concordance between expected substance reported by clients and results from point-of-care drug checking at music festivals and events in British Columbia.

Methods: From July to September 2018, we provided drug checking services at four events using combination Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy and fentanyl immunoassay strips. We measured concordance between expected substance as reported by clients to the results from the FTIR/fentanyl immunoassay strip and tracked unexpected adulterants.

Results: In total, 336 checks were completed. Most samples were expected by clients to be psychedelics (69.3%) or stimulants (19.6%). Of the 233 psychedelic samples, 169 (72.5%) contained the expected, unadulterated substance, and 27 (11.6%) contained additional contaminants. Of 66 stimulant samples, 41 (62.1%) contained expected substance, while 24 (36.4%) contained additional contaminants. Unexpected adulterants such as fentanyl, levamisole, and phenacetin were also found, in addition to several novel psychoactive substances.

Discussion: We found a large proportion of substances that contained unexpected adulterants. Our findings highlight the value of continued drug checking and will be helpful in designing future harm reduction interventions in similar contexts.

Keywords: Drug checking; Festivals; Harm reduction; Public health.

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