

Drink Spiking – Myths and Facts

MYTH #1

Drink spikers most commonly use drugs such as Rohypnol, GHB and Ketamine.

Despite public perceptions that drugs such as Rohypnol, GHB and Ketamine are commonly used to spike drinks, toxicology results do not support these claims. Rohypnol as a brand name for the generic drug flunitrazepam was withdrawn from sale in Australia in 1998. The substance flunitrazepam is easily detected in urine, even in very low concentrations but is very infrequently detected by toxicology screening in drink spiking cases.

The drug most commonly used to spike drinks is alcohol which is relatively cheap, legal and easily available. In many instances alcohol can be added to drinks without arousing suspicion.

MYTH #2

Alcohol alone could not produce the severe effects commonly associated with drink spiking.

The most common physiological effects attributed to drink spiking are vomiting, loss of consciousness, poor coordination and balance, slurred speech, lowered inhibitions (“losing control”), sleepiness or drowsiness, dizziness, loss of motor skills, impaired judgement, visual problems and nausea. These effects are also commonly experienced, in varying degrees, in moderate to severe alcohol intoxication.

MYTH #3

The drugs used to spike drinks are tasteless, colourless and odourless, making them almost impossible to detect by the drinker.

Most tablets are made up of largely insoluble materials that leave noticeable sediment in the glass. Some drugs have a strong smell and a strong taste, making them potentially easier to notice. Relatively tasteless alcohol, such as vodka or tequila, may not be easily detected by a drinker when added to another alcoholic or strongly flavoured drink.

MYTH #4

There is currently a drink spiking ‘epidemic’ in New South Wales.

In NSW reported drink spiking incidents have increased over recent years, however this is a reflection of greater public awareness of the issues which has led to an increase in reporting. The number of reported incidents do not amount to an epidemic and remain low.

The barriers to reporting drink spiking incidents to police are widely acknowledged and include poor recall, amnesia, embarrassment or fear of not being believed. NSW Police make every effort to investigate all reported incidents of drink spiking and to prosecute those involved.



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MYTH #5

Drink spiking almost always results in victims being sexually assaulted by a stranger.

The vast majority of the drink spiking incidents reported to police do not involve any other crime, ie assault, sexual assault or robbery. Further, the vast majority of reported sexual assaults do not involve the offender 'spiking' the victim.

A person who spikes a drink may be the victim's friend, acquaintance, friend of a friend, work mate, date, team member, or a stranger. There is often no intent on the part of the spiker/s to commit any crime other than to see what the effect on the victim will be. Most of these 'prank spikers' would not consider their actions to be criminal or to constitute an assault or actual harm.

"Date rape" is a confusing term often used by the media and the wider community when discussing drink spiking and drug facilitated sexual assault. Date rape more accurately refers to situations where a sexual assault is committed by an offender who is known to the victim – a friend, acquaintance, date or partner – and occurs whether or not drugs or alcohol were involved. Date rape does not mean drink spiking is involved.

MYTH #6

Drink spiking mainly occurs in nightclubs or pubs.

Drinks can be spiked in any location where they are consumed – nightclubs, bars, dance parties, private residences, barbecues, community celebrations and restaurants.

MYTH #7

Drink spiking is a relatively new crime.

Adding a stupefying or intoxicating substance into another person's drink or food is an old crime, often carried out as a 'prank' for the amusement of the offender/s. This does not diminish the seriousness of the offence or the fact that other serious and traumatising crimes can follow. Crimes prosecuted can hold between 5 years and up to 25 years imprisonment depending on the seriousness of the offence.

However, investigating these crimes is often difficult for police, as victims can have little or no memory of the incident, or are reluctant to report the incident due to embarrassment or because they know, or have a relationship with, the suspected offender/s.

**IN AN EMERGENCY CALL
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POLICE HEADQUARTERS

1 Charles Street
Parramatta NSW 2150
Ph (02) 8835 9271
International 612 8835 9271
7.30am - 5pm AEST, Monday to Friday

WEB SITE

www.police.nsw.gov.au

CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE UNIT

Sydney Metropolitan Area
Free call 1800 622 571

CRIME STOPPERS

This community based policing service gathers details of criminal activity volunteered by members of the public. Cash rewards of up to \$1,000 are available if this information leads to an arrest. Information can be given anonymously.

Free call 1800 333 000

POLICE ASSISTANCE LINE

For reporting of crime which does not require immediate police presence.

24 hour service 131 444

Issued by NSW Police Media Unit
(02) 8263 6100

Authorised by Superintendent Greig
Newbery – SCC Drug Squad

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