

## Media Release

23 November 2016

### **Alcohol mixed with energy drinks a recipe for risky behaviour**

Consumption of alcohol mixed with energy drinks (AmED) is associated with greater risk taking behaviour and users are more likely to be at risk of problem gambling and report higher levels of mental ill-health, according to new VicHealth-funded research.

The research, undertaken by Turning Point, Monash and Deakin Universities, found that AmED use was linked with hazardous alcohol consumption levels and that users deliberately consume AmED in the context of ‘a big night out’.

The release of the data comes as thousands of Victorian and NSW Year 12 students prepare for the start of schoolies this weekend.

The three-year project included six separate studies, including observation of patrons in pubs across five Australian cities, a Deakin University online student survey, an Australian population phone survey, a street intercept study with Victorian schoolies, analysis of Victorian ambulance data and interviews with 25 young AmED consumers.

Although only one in twenty of the general population reported consuming AmED in the past three months, the study found use of AmED was significantly higher among young people with one in five 18 to 24-year olds and one in 10 25-39 year olds reporting recent use. One third (32%) of Deakin University survey participants reported AmED use in the past three months and 16 % of Victorian Schoolies reported AmED use in the past 12 hours.

The Schoolies study found those who reported AmED consumption in the past 12 hours had consumed significantly more alcoholic drinks on average (11.3 for AmED consumers compared with 8.3 for non-users).

Interviews with AmED consumers also revealed they self-identified as heavy drinkers, were out for a big night when consuming AmED and deliberately and purposively reserved their consumption for heavy drinking sessions.

Professor Dan Lubman from Turning Point and Monash University said consumers often drank AmED’s in the hope it would make them feel less drunk and more alert on a big night out to enable them to stay out later than they would otherwise be able to.

“These findings lend support to the theory that when people drink AmED they generally drink more alcohol and exhibit a tendency for greater risk taking behaviour because they choose AmED as part of a repertoire of risky practices,” Prof. Lubman said.

#### **Media Contact**

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“Interestingly this research found a link between AmED use and gambling, and AmED use and psychological problems for the first time, and future work should further explore this association.

“Given that AmED use is part of a broader repertoire of risky drinking practices and alcohol-related harms continue to increase in Australia, policies with a known evidence base for reducing alcohol harm such as restricted trading hours, reducing outlet density and restrictions on alcohol advertising should be supported by state and national governments.”

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said the research highlighted the importance of educating drinkers, particularly young people, about the harms of excessive alcohol and likely risks of caffeine toxicity.

“While regular consumption of alcohol mixed with energy drinks is fairly low across Victorians as a whole, the percentage of young people consuming these drinks is much higher. Worryingly, these drinkers are often involved in risk taking behaviour and ‘big nights’ nights fuelled with binge drinking and excessive alcohol consumption,” Ms Rechter said.

“Education campaigns around these drinks should target high risk groups and focus on decreasing the risk of harm from high alcohol and caffeine intake. This could include highlighting myths around caffeinated products, including the belief AmED’s mask the effects of intoxication.

“Excessive alcohol intake can be associated with a higher risk of injury from a single occasion of drinking, or at risk of chronic disease over the longer term. Drinking too much caffeine can also cause increased heart rate, agitation, insomnia and dehydration. In addition, these types of drinks are loaded with sugar, which we know contributes to growing obesity rates and can contain high amounts of sodium which can increase blood pressure and is linked to a range of chronic diseases.

“This research highlights the need for coordinated action where risk and harm is greatest. Limiting the availability of AmED, alcohol and non-alcoholic energy drinks at times associated with the greatest concentration of risk-taking behavior and related harms will help to limit the impact on young people and bystanders.

“Targeted awareness campaigns, and better product labelling to inform consumers about the potential risks of these products and guidelines for responsible consumption are also important.”

For a copy of the research summary visit <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/alcohol-mixed-with-energy-drinks-report>

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