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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2005 annual meeting, May 25-27, 2005, Washington, DC.

ECSTASY DRUG USE INCREASES HIGH-RISK SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS

'Rave' club and private party scene focus of research on potential for HIV transmission and other risks

- Are users of the club drug MDMA (Ecstasy) more likely to engage in high-risk sex?
- What elements of the 'rave' and private party scene encourage drug use?
- Is there potential to create interventions at rave events and in other private environments, where ecstasy is used, to help young adults avoid use?

Rave dances have prompted a resurgence of psychedelic drug use in the United States. Raves usually feature pulsating 'techno' dance music; attendees, mostly older teenagers and young adults, typically dance for hours, often while using 'club drugs.' The most prevalent such drug for the past several years is MDMA or Ecstasy, a drug believed to heighten sexual pleasure and create a feeling of well-being. From its initial use at raves, MDMA has spread and has now been incorporated into the everyday drug repertoires of some urban Latino and African American youth. It is also used in private party and other social settings, and is associated with unprotected and experimental sex.

Prior research has explored Ecstasy use, sexual risk-taking, and transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) primarily in the gay club scene. Several new studies will report on whether Ecstasy use may lead to an increase in HIV and other STD transmission by increasing the likelihood of risky sex or its consequences in association with electronic dance events and among primarily urban heterosexual young adults from diverse racial/ethnic groups.

The results of these studies will be presented by researchers at the Society for Prevention Research annual meeting in Washington DC. Three papers will highlight ecstasy use and sexual behaviors among 18 to 25 year olds, the developmental stage at which drug abuse and sexual risk-taking both peak.

Two will focus on the electronic dance scene already known to increase the risk of HIV transmission. Presenters will also discuss the impact of club characteristics such as crowding, security, and tolerance for intoxication, as well as the potential for working with rave sponsors and club owners to create drug prevention programs at raves.

A third paper focuses on Ecstasy use, sexual experimentation and sexual risk among urban youth and young adults (16-24 years old) who attend clubs, bars, and private parties and gatherings. It will discuss alternative approaches for reaching this hidden population with risk-reduction strategies.

Sources: Susan Martin, Ph.D., National Institute on Drug Abuse; George Yacoubian, Ph.D, and Brenda Miller, Ph.D., Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation; Jean Schensul, Ph.D., Institute for Community Research.