
Partying safely - schoolies week

Summary

- Schoolies week is a great opportunity to catch up with friends and relax after a year of hard work.
- Partying can be fun but make sure you use your head, stick with your friends and look out for each other.
- Think about your values regarding sex, alcohol and drugs – decide before you go what you're prepared to do and where to draw the line.
- You are vulnerable to all sorts of dangers when you're affected by drugs and alcohol – try not to drink too much, and if you do take drugs, know what you are taking.

Every year in late November or December, thousands of Australian school-leavers head to holiday destinations around the country for schoolies week (or leavers week in WA), to celebrate the end of school life. The intense partying can be lots of fun, but you need to be aware of the risks, which can include accidents, robbery, violence and sexual assault.

Before schoolies week

It helps if you plan ahead. Work out your 'boundaries' before you leave – being clear about your limits can help to avoid unpleasant or dangerous situations.

Here are some suggestions:

- Think about your values regarding sex, alcohol and drugs. Decide what you're prepared to do and where to draw the line.
- Talk to your friends about where they stand on these matters, and plan ways to look out for each other.
- Let your family and loved ones know where you are going, and with whom.
- If you're going to Lorne, Torquay, Rye or Phillip Island, register with **Good Times, Great Breaks** – they provide support and free services to school leavers in these places during schoolies week.
- If you have a medical condition, let others know so they can look out for you. Read up on advice about how you can travel safely and work this into your plans.

What to pack

- Remember to include a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent (**mosquitoes carry diseases** and can make a misery of your holiday), a small first aid kit, and any medications or prescriptions you may need. And don't forget your phone charger.
- Take your Medicare card with you, and make sure you have ambulance cover – this can save you a lot of money if you have to pay for medical treatment or a trip to hospital.
- If you have private health insurance, know what it covers.

Heading overseas?

If you're lucky enough to be **heading overseas** plan ahead so you can prevent additional costs and deal with problems like getting out of a remote area or getting medical help:

- See your doctor six to eight weeks before you go to arrange any **travel vaccinations** or medications you may need.
- Let friends and family know where you are going and register your plans at **Smart Traveller**.
- Make sure you have travel insurance and record the policy numbers somewhere safe.
- Scan or take photos of important documents such as your passport and ID, and email them to yourself and

family. Keep a copy of these documents with you too.

- Know where to find help if you need it. Have the contact details of the Australian embassy handy. If there isn't one, find out who else you can ask for assistance.

Safety tips for schoolies week

Sometimes, when you're in a group, you may find yourself doing things you would never do when alone. Remember to stick to your own values, because you will be accountable for your own actions in the end.

Suggestions include:

- Obey the house rules – don't get kicked out of your accommodation.
- Carry the hotel's contact details with you in case you get lost or need to give a taxi driver the address on your way home.
- Keep your hotel room locked. If you're sharing, make sure you know who has the key or swipe card, and stick with them. Or you could leave the key at the front desk if there is a 24-hour concierge.
- Before going out, make a plan to meet somewhere in case you get separated.
- Stick with your friends and watch out for each other. Walk to and from the main schoolies area in groups.
- Never wander off alone. Avoid going off with people you are not friends with, particularly if you have had drugs or a few drinks.
- Make sure your phone is charged and has plenty of credit.
- Carry some spare cash, just in case. Have emergency contact numbers with you at all times.
- Always carry condoms and use them if you decide to have sex.
- Remember, you don't have to drink or take drugs to have a good time.

Drinking and drugs – survival tips

If you're going to drink or take **drugs at schoolies**, be smart about it. You want to remember these fun times and not wake up with a massive hangover or be too out of it to enjoy yourself!

- Decide on a limit and stick to it.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach; eat well before you go out.
- Pace yourself, try to alternate an alcoholic drink with something soft, like water. Keep hydrated too.
- Keep an eye on your drinks. **Drink spiking** can happen to anyone and be done by anyone – and that includes mates. That's why it pays to take control and buy your own. If a stranger offers you a drink don't accept it. When at bars, watch while staff prepare your drinks.
- If you decide to take drugs, stay with your friends at all times and tell them what kind you are planning to take so they can give this information to ambulance officers or other medical staff in case of an **overdose**.
- Know what you are drinking or taking. **Drugs** such as **amphetamines** may contain 'fillers' such as household cleaning products, so it can be difficult to know what reactions to expect and how bad side effects will be.
- Steer clear of **synthetic drugs** – even though they may be marketed as being 'legal or safe' to use, they aren't. Although they claim to mimic the effects of illicit drugs, (such as **cannabis**, **cocaine** and **ecstasy**), there is limited research and control on what chemicals are in them and their health effects.
- Don't feel pressured by your mates – if you think you've had too much, or don't want any, say no.
- Don't mix drugs with alcohol, prescription medications, caffeine, over-the-counter medicines or other illicit drugs.
- If you're feeling down, anxious or depressed, it's probably best to avoid alcohol and drugs as they can heighten your mood and make symptoms worse.
- Trust your instincts – if you feel unsafe, move away from the situation.
- Contact **Red Frogs**, they provide peer support for young people aged 15 to 25 in alcohol-fuelled environments, including the main schoolies locations.
- You can find more tips on partying safely at **Partying safely – tips for teenagers**.

It's okay to ask for support

If you need help during schoolies and you're at one of the main locations, call the **Red Frogs** helpline on **1300 557 123** at any time. Let them know where you are staying (or where you are) and they will jump to the rescue – they can walk you home, chat with you if you're having a tough time, even give you a feed of pancakes!

If you are feeling down, worried about your mental health, or needing support, call **headspace** on **1800 650 890**, or chat with a counsellor online at **eheadspace**, from 9 am to 1am, 7 days.

You can call **Kids Helpline** any time of the day or night. It's a free, private and confidential phone and online counselling service for people aged 5 to 25. Call **1800 55 1800** or **webchat**.

If you are thinking about **suicide**, or experiencing personal crisis, let someone know how you are feeling – ask for help.

Talk to a family member, a friend, one of the Red Frogs at schoolies, or call **Lifeline** on **13 11 14**, 24/7. (You can also use the **Lifeline online chat service** from 7pm -12am, 7 days.) Describe how you are feeling, and let them know what help you need. **beyondblue** has some suggestions for how to talk about **suicide**. Remember, thoughts of suicide are just thoughts – you do not have to act on them.

ReachOut.com has online forums where you can talk to other young people going through tough times, read about what helped them, and share what you are going through. You can also use ReachOut to access information on heaps of issues that affect young people.

How to avoid other risks

You've spent so many years in school and put in the hard yards, so you want to make this a memorable time, right? Try these few simple precautions when out and about.

Avoiding troublemakers during schoolies week

Be aware of troublemakers and avoid them. The main offenders include:

- **'toolies'** – people who aren't school-leavers, but who attend schoolies events anyway. They are often older and there to take advantage of teenagers who have been drinking or taking drugs
- **sexual predators** – some people are attracted to schoolies week by the high number of teenagers. Of course, you can't always tell who wishes you harm. Play it safe – stay with your friends and never wander off alone, or with someone you don't know
- **media** – some people act up in front of cameras, which they may later regret. The media can make you look bad, especially when you are partying hard.

A word on drink spiking

Remember, anyone is capable of spiking your drink – even your friends. Lots of **drink spiking** involves people adding more alcohol (as opposed to other drugs) to friends' drinks.

So don't leave drinks sitting around. If you all hit the dance-floor at once, buy new drinks afterwards. If you can, get drinks with lids you have to open yourself.

Don't accept drinks from anyone – that includes water.

If you think someone has had their drink spiked, tell the manager or host immediately and contact emergency services by calling 000.

Sexual assault

Unfortunately, sexual assault can happen to anyone, and is all too common during schoolies week, even with people we know.

If you feel someone is pressuring you into having sex, or makes you feel uncomfortable, tell them. By law, sex must be consensual, which also means respecting others' decisions when they say 'no' or if they are too out of it to consent.

You can protect yourself, by sticking with your friends and not wandering off alone. Don't accept offers from strangers to go to private places. At the end of the night, it pays to catch a cab or use a service like **Red Frogs** (Tel. **1300 557 123**) to see you home safely.

If you plan to have vaginal, anal or oral sex, use condoms to protect yourself and your partner against **(sexually transmissible infections STIs)** and an **unplanned pregnancy**.

Don't risk physical injuries

- Although it is tempting to go barefoot, it's better to keep your shoes on when outside, even on the beach. If you are in an area where there are loads of people, watch for broken glass and syringes. Don't sit down without checking first or you may be in for a nasty surprise!
- You are less aware and more likely to be involved in an accident when you have been drinking or taking drugs. Don't take risks – such as swimming or diving in unfamiliar water, or driving or getting into a car with someone who has been drinking or taking drugs.

Avoiding crime and violence

- **Steer clear** of groups of young people who seem to be wandering without purpose. Hormones, drugs and alcohol can be a dangerous mix. Violence tends to spread through a crowd, so don't hang around to watch if a brawl starts
- **To avoid theft** – don't leave your things unattended (such as, on the beach or at a club). Take it in turns to look after everyone's stuff.

Where to get help

- Police Tel. 000
- Ambulance Tel. 000
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- **Red Frogs** – for peer support while at schoolies Tel. **1300 557 123**
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 551 800**
- **DirectLine** Tel. **1800 888 236** – for 24-hour confidential drug and alcohol telephone counselling, information and referral
- **Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)** Tel. **1800 458 685** – for young people, 24-hour confidential drug and alcohol telephone counselling, information and referral
- **Alcohol and Drug Foundation** Tel. **1300 85 85 84**
- **Family Planning Victoria** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages Tel. **1800 013 952** or **(03) 9257 0100**
- **Melbourne Sexual Health Centre** Tel. **(03) 9341 6200** or **1800 032 017**
- **Family Planning Victoria Action Centre** – comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for people of all ages, with an afternoon drop-in clinic for people under 25 years of age Tel: **(03) 9660 4700** or **1800 013 952**
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Line** Tel. **1800 806 292**
- **1800 RESPECT** National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service (Australia) Tel. **1800 737 732** – free telephone counselling hotline (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Victims of Crime** Helpline Tel. **1800 819 817**
- **Information about travelling with a health condition:**
 - Allergy: **Travelling with an allergy**
 - Asthma: **Asthma and travel**
 - Diabetes: **Travel**, Diabetes Australia.
 - Epilepsy: **Epilepsy – lifestyle issues** – contains a section on epilepsy and travel

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