Partying safely and sex

Summary

- When drunk or using drugs, you are more likely to engage in unsafe (unprotected) sex than you would when you are sober.
- When partying, make sure that you have easy access to condoms to reduce your risk of pregnancy or getting a sexually transmissible disease (STI).
- There is a strong association between alcohol and sexual assault, but it does not cause it.
- If you are sexually assaulted, it is never your fault – it is always the fault of the perpetrator.
- Sexual assault can be committed by someone you know really well (such as your boyfriend or girlfriend) or by an acquaintance or stranger.
- When partying, stick with your friends and people you trust and look out for each other.

Partying is fun, but it can also put you at risk. Partying in general carries risks of unplanned, unwanted and unsafe (unprotected) sex but these risks are even greater if you’re drunk or out of it on drugs. In fact, alcohol is a feature in a high proportion of sexual assaults.

Sexual assault is always the fault of the perpetrator. It is never the fault of the person it happens to. If you are partying and you experience sexual harassment or sexual assault, it is not your fault.

Being aware that there is a relationship between alcohol and sexual assault can empower you to take steps to increase your safety while partying.

Safe partying tips

You can have lots of fun and stay safe when partying. Keep these general safety issues in mind:

- You can have lots of fun without alcohol and/or other drugs.
- If you’re drinking, pace yourself and stay alert; try to break up alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks or water. When you are drunk or using drugs, you are more likely to do things you normally wouldn’t do when you’re sober (such as having unplanned or unsafe sex). And other people may take advantage of you when you’re out of it.
- Don’t leave a nightclub or party with someone you’ve just met, even if that person seems nice. Take their number and call them the next day if you’re still interested.
- Carry (male or female) condoms and if you have sex, use them, every time.
- Don’t be pressured into sex or any other type of physical intimacy. It’s your life, your choice. If you don’t want to have sex or if the person you’re with is moving too fast or making you feel uneasy in any way, tell them.
- Remember it’s not just strangers who are the problem. Unwanted advances and sexual assault are often committed by acquaintances or even someone you know really well (such as your boyfriend or girlfriend).

Keep your wits about you when partying

Using alcohol or other drugs can cloud people’s judgment, affect their decision-making and reduce their ability to assess risks. It is also often a contributing factor in sexual assault, although it is not the sole cause of it. If you do decide to use alcohol or other drugs:

- Set yourself a limit of alcoholic drinks and keep count, alternating alcohol with water or soft drink.
- Know what you’re taking if you decide to take a drug and don’t mix it with alcohol or other drugs. Make sure you understand the risks related to taking that drug. Nominate at least one friend to stay straight who can help in case of trouble. Let that friend know what you are going to take, in case anything goes wrong.
- Stick with your friends or people you trust and look out for each other.

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Reduce the risk of drink spiking when partying

To spike a drink means to put alcohol or other drugs into someone’s drink without them knowing. Estimates suggest that one-third of drink spiking incidents are linked to sexual assault. It is illegal, whether it is done by someone intending you harm, or by a friend as a joke. To protect yourself from drink spiking:

- Buy your own drinks and watch the bartender prepare them.
- Keep an eye on your drinks.
- If you have to leave your drink unattended, buy a new one.
- Don’t accept drinks from strangers.
- Don’t let others top up your drink.
- Buy drinks that have screw-top lids so you can carry them with you if you go to the toilet or have a dance.
- Keep in mind that drink spiking is commonly done by someone you know, and most often involves adding extra alcohol to your drink without you knowing about it.

Victoria Police has more information about drink spiking.

Going to clubs and venues to party

You’ll be safer if you arrive, hang out and leave with a group of friends. Suggestions include:

- Stay with your friends.
- Don’t leave the venue with strangers.
- Avoid walking through poorly lit side streets. Stick to main roads. Get a cab or an Uber home – don’t walk.
  Public transport is available in Melbourne for 24 hours on weekends.
- Agree with your friends beforehand where to meet if you become separated.

Act responsibly towards others when partying

Peer pressure can make people do all sorts of things they would otherwise not do. Act with care and consideration to other people and:

- Don’t encourage anyone else to use alcohol or other drugs, or tell them they’re ‘no fun’ if they decide not to drink.
- Don’t spike anyone’s drink.
- Don’t make sexual advances towards someone who is too out of it to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. It’s a crime to engage in any sexual activity (including things like touching) with someone without their consent. This includes if someone is too intoxicated and therefore considered unable to consent.
- Don’t pressure your partner to have sex or try to manipulate them, for example, by flirting with someone else.
- Remember, if the person you’re with says ‘yes’ at first, but then changes their mind, you must respect their decision. Otherwise, it’s a crime.

Partying and unsafe sex

If you have had unsafe sex and are worried about pregnancy or sexually transmissible infections (STI), there are steps you can take to look after yourself.

Emergency contraception is used to prevent pregnancy if you have had unsafe sex – for example if the condom broke, you missed taking your pill, or if you didn’t have any condoms with you and had sex anyway. There are two types of emergency contraception:

- the copper IUD – you’ll need an appointment with a doctor or nurse to have one inserted
- the emergency contraceptive (‘morning after’) pill – you can buy these at a pharmacy without a prescription
  (Be sure to ask the pharmacist if this a good option for you, especially if you are taking certain types of medication, including other contraceptives, or if you are breast feeding. The emergency contraceptive pill is not suitable for everyone.)

Learn more about emergency contraception.

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If you think you could have been **exposed to an STI**, talk to your GP or sexual health service about having a check-up, even if you do not have any signs or symptoms.

**Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Police Tel. 000
- Ambulance Tel. 000
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 551 800**
- **Family Planning Victoria** Tel. (03) 9257 0100
- **Melbourne Sexual Health Centre** Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or **1800 032 017**
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Line** and **CASA** Tel. **1800 806 292**
- **1800RESPECT** National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service Tel. **1800 737 732** – free telephone counselling hotline (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Victims of Crime Helpline** Tel. **1800 819 817**
- **DirectLine** Tel. **1800 888 236** – for 24-hour confidential drug and alcohol telephone counselling, information and referral

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