

Poppers

PRODUCED BY GAY MEN'S HEALTH

FACT SHEET 1

WHAT ARE POPPERS?

"Poppers" is the popular or street name for various alkyl nitrites, including isobutyl nitrite, butyl nitrite, and amyl nitrite.

Doctors used to prescribe amyl nitrite for patients with a heart condition, in capsules that were broken or "popped" to release vapours.

Most poppers are isobutyl nitrite or butyl nitrite and are sold in small brown bottles, often in sex shops and increasingly over the internet.

The exact content of these products are not always known, and they are often not safety tested.

These products have long been part of the club culture from the 1970's disco scene to the 1980's and 1990's rave scene.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS?

Alkyl nitrites are often used as a club drug or to enhance a sexual experience.

Inhaling nitrites relaxes muscles throughout the body, including the sphincter muscles of the anus and the vagina. This causes the blood vessels to dilate (which causes a sudden drop in blood pressure), increases the heart rate, and produces a sensation of heat and excitement that usually lasts for a couple of minutes.

The head rush, euphoria, and other sensations that result from the blood vessel dilation are often experienced as increased sexual arousal and desire.

At the same time, the relaxation of the sphincters of the anus and vagina can make penetration easier. It is alleged that poppers can enhance and prolong orgasms.

While anecdotal evidence reveals that both men and women can find the experience of using poppers pleasurable, this experience is not universal.

Some men report that a reduction in erection stiffness can interfere with sexual performance.

BE CAREFUL

Contact with the skin causes irritation and rashes. Extensive use can damage the nose and lungs.

Poppers can cause headaches. For some people, these headaches can be quite severe.

Some people also experience sensations of spinning or falling.

Poppers pose extra risks for people who have suppressed immune systems, heart problems, low or high blood pressure, circulatory problems, a history of cerebral haemorrhaging, anaemia, breathing problems, glaucoma, or are pregnant.

There is some debate as to whether using poppers if you are HIV positive can promote Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS). Some studies have suggested this is true while others have concluded that it's not true. There has also been the suggestion that, with regard to KS and poppers, there is a correlation between high popper usage and high risk sexual activity, and the high risk sexual activity may increase the likelihood of KS. Again, opinions on this differ.

Combining poppers with stimulants like speed, cocaine and ecstasy increases risks. Combining poppers and Viagra is dangerous because both cause blood pressure to drop.

Poppers are highly flammable. Keep away from cigarettes, candles and lighters.



HIV AND POPPERS

Poppers may interfere with some drugs used to treat HIV infection.

Some HIV treatments can also cause erectile problems. To counteract this, drugs such as Viagra, Cialis and Levitra may be prescribed. Using poppers with these other drugs is not advised as they may significantly decrease blood pressure.

LEGAL ISSUES

In South Australia isobutyl nitrite, butyl nitrite and amyl nitrite are Schedule 4 products and supply, sale, possession and administration to another person of these products is contrary to section 18 of the Controlled Substances Act unless specifically permitted and is therefore illegal.

Gay Men's Health does not endorse or promote the use of poppers. ■

INFORMATION ON THIS FACT SHEET HAS BEEN OBTAINED FROM:

<http://www.dancesafe.org/documents/druginfo/poppers.php>

<http://www.urban75.com/Drugs/drugamyl.html>

Thank you to Drug and Alcohol Services South Australia for their input

Darling House - 64 Fullarton Road, Norwood SA 5067
Darling House: (08) 8334 1606

Man2Man InfoLine City Callers: (08) 8334 1617
Man2Man InfoLine Country Callers: 1800 671 582

gmhealth@gmhealth.org.au
www.acsa.org.au/gmh.html



**Gay Men's Health works with gay, bisexual and
same sex attracted men in South Australia**