

What are PMA and PMMA?

PMA (paramethoxyamphetamine) and PMMA (paramethoxymethamphetamine) are in the same class of drugs as MDMA or “Ecstasy” (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine). PMA is also known by the street name “death” or “Dr. Death”. As with MDMA, these drugs tend to be distributed in colorful, branded tablets and are taken by mouth.

Although they are different drugs than MDMA, PMA/PMMA is often sold as “Ecstasy” or an “Ecstasy substitute”. Buyers may think they are getting MDMA, when in fact they are getting PMA/PMMA or some combination of different drugs. In other cases, users may be prompted to take PMA/PMMA together with MDMA to enhance the effects.

Why do people take PMA/PMMA?

These drugs are often taken for their purported euphoric and stimulant effects. Users report feeling “at peace” and as though “all is right with the world”. Users often also believe that these drugs may increase sexuality and enhance pleasure.

How are PMA/PMMA different from MDMA (‘Ecstasy’)?

PMA/PMMA is considered to be more toxic than MDMA, more likely to cause side effects including seizures and increased body temperature. Also, the initial effects of PMA/PMMA are often delayed and milder than MDMA, leading users to believe they have taken a weak MDMA product. Users will then often take more of the drug in an attempt to get the desired effects.

The other effects that can happen are similar to those from MDMA. It can often cause feelings of anxiety and paranoia. It can also lead to hallucinations (hearing voices or seeing things). Users report dry mouth, teeth grinding, sweating or nausea. Some may experience chest pain, palpitations (an awareness of their heartbeat). Others may experience headache, weakness, or difficulty speaking. As with MDMA, PMA/PMMA can also have serious, life-threatening side effects when used on its own, and/or if combined with other medications (including anti-depressants).

So, PMA/PMMA use can be fatal?

Yes. Whether used on its own, or in combination with other medications (including anti-depressants), significant and life-threatening health consequences are a very real danger when taking any PMA/PMMA.

As with MDMA, PMA/PMMA acts as a stimulant and causes an increase in heart rate and blood pressure, which can lead to heart attacks and strokes. These drugs can also cause multiple systems in the body to shut down.

Can users be certain that their MDMA is “pure”?

No. MDMA and other illicit drugs often contain other chemicals which can cause their own side effects with potential threat to life. There is no “safe” street drug.

If I only take a small amount, can I avoid the bad effects?

No. There have been many cases where people have died or had serious, life-threatening side effects after taking a single pill.

But if I know I am getting “pure” MDMA or ‘Ecstasy’, I don’t have to worry, right?

No. PMA/PMMA and MDMA as well as other illicit drugs often contain other chemicals which can cause their own side effects with potential threat to life. There is no “safe” street drug, and there is no safe dose of a street drug.

How would I know if I have taken PMA/PMMA rather than MDMA, and what should I do?

You won’t know. The only way this can be determined is by testing urine or blood or by laboratory assessment of the pills themselves. An adverse reaction to PMA/PMMA can be very similar to MDMA and can mean different things to different people. These drugs can often cause feelings of anxiety, paranoia and can lead to hallucinations (hearing voices or seeing things). Users will also often report dry mouth, teeth grinding, sweating or nausea. Some may experience chest pain, palpitations (an awareness of their heartbeat), headache, weakness, or difficulty speaking.

The Poison and Drug Information Service (PADIS) is a free, confidential, 24/7 service for all Albertans. Staff are specially trained in the assessment and management of exposures to drugs and toxins like PMA/PMMA and are available by calling 1-800-332-1414.

If anyone who has used PMA/PMMA becomes unconscious, stops breathing, experiences chest pain or has a seizure, call 911 or your local ambulance immediately.

If you are concerned about your own drug or alcohol use, the drug and/or alcohol use of a friend or loved one, or would simply like more information on drug and alcohol use, contact the Addiction & Mental Health 24 Hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.