Chemsex in London

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What is chemsex?

- Utilising drugs either immediately before or during sex:
  - GBL/GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyric acid/gaba-butyrolactone)
  - Crystal methamphetamine
  - Mephedrone
- Men aged 30-40 years more likely to use
- More likely in MSM with HIV-1 infection
- Factor driving HIV-1 transmission amongst MSM in United Kingdom
- HIV-1 incidence amongst MSM rising since 2000 and now at a level seen in 1980s

Philips AN. PLoS ONE; 2013:
Geography of chemsex

- 2010 community surveys indicated use in preceding 4 weeks:
  - 4.9% MSM in Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
  - 2.9% in remainder of London
  - 0.7% elsewhere in England

Bourne. The Chemsex Study. LSHTM 2014
Effects of chemsex

- Self esteem, self confidence issues
- Facilitate sexual adventure
- Sexual longevity, sex with more people

Table 1  Drugs commonly associated with chemsex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name (street names)</th>
<th>Means of delivery</th>
<th>Typical effects</th>
<th>Typical duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GHB/GBL (G, Gina, liquid ecstasy)</td>
<td>Swallowed in small liquid doses</td>
<td>Sedation and anaesthetisation: euphoria, disinhibition; drowsiness</td>
<td>Up to 7 h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mephedrone (meow-meow, MCAT, plant food)</td>
<td>Snorted as a powder, injected or administered rectally</td>
<td>Stimulation: euphoria, alertness, affection, confidence; anxiety, paranoia</td>
<td>About 1 h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal methamphetamine (Christine, Tina, T, crystal, ice, yaba)</td>
<td>Snorted as powder, smoked in glass pipe or injected</td>
<td>Stimulation: exhilaration, alertness, disinhibition; agitation, paranoia, confusion, aggression</td>
<td>4–12 h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://www.talktofrank.com
GBL, gamma-butyrolactone; GHB, gamma-hydroxybutyric acid.

Bourne. Sex Transm Infect. 2015 Jul 9
Problems?

– Not always a ‘problem’

– Immediate: overdosing with GBL/GHB (very small doses, regular intervals), convulsions, panic attacks

– Sexual health: not using condoms, more STIs (cf Shigella flexneri 3a 2012 outbreak), low adherence to ART, HIV-1 transmission

– Qualitative studies indicate that this is not a universal truth
Harm reduction strategies

- Education on use of drugs
- Use of pre-exposure prophylaxis in MSM at high risk of HIV acquisition
- Management of ART in HIV +ve MSM practicing chemsex
- Work with social media applications (e.g. Grindr)
- Targeted clinic-based and community based harm reduction and sexual health interventions