

KEEP IT SAFE, ENJOY TOMORROW

Doctors go to parties too, as evidenced by Ken Dewitte, who goes to Tomorrowland every year as a visitor. This year, he's looking forward to seeing Netsky most. But Ken isn't just any old music fan: he is also an emergency doctor at Antwerp University Hospital, where he treats people who need acute help, including those who are adversely affected by drug use. Here, the doctor/DJ-lover shares his ideas about his practice, explains some of the risks involved, and explains how to keep an eye out for your friends.

Tomorrowland is one of the most happy and positive places in the world, and it's seemingly difficult not to have a good time. "That's most easily done when you keep yourself out of the danger zone," says Dewitte. "Drug taking is a risk that's not worth taking, and many people don't realize you don't have to binge-use in order to put yourself in danger. Alcohol has its dark sides too, but cocaine, MDMA/ecstasy and other hard drugs are harder to dose. Everybody knows you won't die after three standard drinks, but class A party drugs can cause strokes, heart attacks and heart rhythm disorders, even after taking very small amounts."

As a doctor, Dewitte has been in many situations where desperate friends brought a victim into the hospital, overcome by feelings of guilt. "They often say that he or she normally never takes drugs, and they regret even bringing up the subject of taking drugs before heading out. Apart from general medical treatment, we usually cool down patients with ice when they're overheated, which is a common symptom. It works in some occasions, but in others it doesn't. That feeling of powerlessness when you can't help a young and previously healthy person is one of the saddest things. That's why one of the things I always suggest to people who do want to take drugs is that they keep it to themselves, without trying to convince others to join. You will never forgive yourself if a friend dies because you've suggested for him or her to take drugs."

One of the reasons drug use is particularly dangerous is that severe injuries can be caused by inverse circumstances. "When taking drugs, there is a danger of dehydration, but also of overhydration. If you drink too much water, the body's salt levels are thrown out of balance, leading to potentially life-threatening situations. Another potential cause of harm, even with limited intake of drugs, is a heightened level of adrenaline. This causes one's blood vessels to narrow and one's heart rate to go up, leading to many potentially deadly scenarios."

People coming to visit Tomorrowland from abroad run an additional, serious risk, says Dewitte. "People don't tend to bring drugs on the plane, so they buy it in Belgium from dealers they can't possibly trust." And if you don't know exactly what a dealer gives you, dosing properly becomes practically

impossible. Dewitte adds to this that for young and inexperienced people from abroad, dosing can be another issue. "Strengths of substances may differ locally, so relatively small amounts of a drug are likely to affect the body quite strongly."

Things to look out for when you realize your friends have been taking drugs include decreased levels of responsiveness, wobbly legs, a desire to lie down, an inability to think straight and, in some cases, drowsiness. It is also important to keep track of how much water your friend drinks, says Dewitte. "Too little is no good. If someone has a dry mouth or dry, chapped lips, that's a bad sign. But too much is no good either. If you see someone drinking abnormally high amounts of water, bring them to the medical team on site. They'll give them some salts to help recovery. Lastly, it is absolutely essential not to let shame determine what you tell the doctors. I can't stress this enough – you can safely tell the doctors exactly what you or your friend took, there will be no bad consequences for you. But the doctors can only help you properly if you're honest."

Clearly, the best way to avoid trouble is to not take drugs. And it's important to note that avoiding drugs means more than taking care of just yourself. Dewitte: "If you say you come to Tomorrowland because the vibe is international and you love everyone, I think it's also good to consider people who are badly affected by the drugs trade. Think of how many runners end up in jail or even end up sentenced to death, just because there's a demand for party drugs. Others get killed by the drug cartels. By not using drugs, people around the world experience a much better Tomorrow."



Love people, don't take drugs