

HEALTH

Cocaine Speeds AIDS Growth

The Associated Press

ATLANTA - Cocaine speeded the growth of the AIDS virus in laboratory tests, prompting concern that it could increase infected people's chances of developing the deadly disease, researchers reported Monday.

Microbiologists at the University of Minnesota Medical school exposed cells that are the primary target for the AIDS virus to doses of cocaine-laced tests than in control studies.

If what happened in the test tube happens in HIV-infected cocaine users, it could increase their risk of developing AIDS, Dr. Ronald Schut, the lead researcher, said.

"In persons who are infected, if they continue to abuse this drug it may have a significant impact on the development of clinical AIDS," Schut said.

While about 150,000 AIDS cases have been reported in the United States, researchers say a million or more are infected and at risk of developing AIDS.

Test-tube tests, however, don't always mimic what happens in the human body. The question now for researchers is whether drug use somehow modifies the immune system to enhance HIV growth in humans.

"The initial in-vitro (test-tube) studies suggest that it's possible," Schut said.

Schut presented the findings at the Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy, sponsored by the American Society for Microbiology.

Further studies are under way using immune cells from drug users in a methadone program, where cocaine use is high, "to see if the virus grows easier," Schut said.

Dr. James Curran, director of the Division of HIV-AIDS at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, said little if any solid information was available concerning the AIDS risk of cocaine users. He added that drug users were notoriously difficult to study and many cocaine users were involved in injectable drug abuse, which can spread HIV by dirty needles.

Nearly one-fourth of the AIDS cases reported in this country stem from intravenous drug use, according to the CDC.

Curran said that while the Minnesota test results might be correct, of greater concern was the practice of trading cocaine for sex, leading to the spread of the AIDS virus by sexual contact.

Still, as far as cocaine is concerned, Curran said, "I think it's safe to recommend don't do it."

Also Monday, Dr. Douglas Richman, an AIDS specialist at the University of California, San Diego, predicted that even without an AIDS vaccine, combination drug treatments will enable infected people to live "normal" lives and approach normal lifespans.

"A patient with HIV will be treated similarly to a patient with diabetes or hypertension - prevent the progression of disease and maintain the quality of life," Richman said.

-Courtesy of The Statesman Journal



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A Deadly Mixture: Cocaine, Alcohol Boost Overdoses

The Associated Press

NEW YORK - People who drink alcohol while using cocaine create a third brain-targeting substance that may help boost their euphoria and may contribute to a puzzling form of overdose death, researchers say.

The research may help explain a preliminary finding that adding alcohol to cocaine use produced 21.5 times the risk of an overdose death for people with severe coronary heart disease, scientists said.

Drinking is frequently combined with cocaine, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

New studies show that a substance called cocaethylene, formed in the liver from alcohol and cocaine, reaches the brain and mimics some actions of cocaine there.

Further studies of cocaethylene may give leads for medications to treat cocaine addiction by blocking cocaine's effects, said Deborah Mash, a neuropharmacologist at the University of Miami School of Medicine who co-wrote the study.

She and other researchers spoke about the work, which was presented Monday at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience in St. Louis.

Scientists found that cocaethylene affects a brain-cell communication system thought to produce the euphoria that leads to cocaine addiction, she said.

The new work shows that cocaethylene also binds to the transporters, suggesting that it may boost cocaine's effect, Mash said.

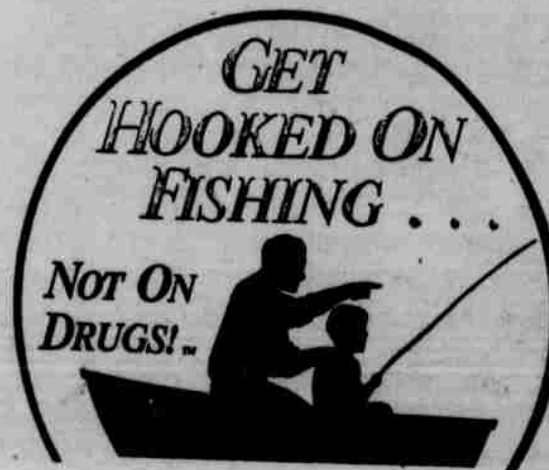
Another possible role of cocaethylene deals with cocaine overdose deaths in people with severe coronary artery disease.

The study reported about 240 cases of fatal cocaine overdose and a comparable number of deaths from other causes in people who had taken cocaine, Rutenber said.

Mash said cocaethylene might play a role in the elevated risk because it could cling to brain cell sites that are supposed to attract a brain-communication substance called acetylcholine.

This may interfere with the brain's control of the heart pumping rhythm, she said. If the heart is already affected by heart disease, the result could be sudden death.

For cocaine users, Rutenber said, such cases suggest that "even if they are careful about the quantities of cocaine they use, they still may not be able to ward off a fatal overdose."



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10:00 - Spirituality

11:00 - ACOA/COA Issues

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Psalm of Alcohol Addiction

King Alcohol is my shepard, I shall always want.
He maketh me to lie down in the gutters.
He leadeth me beside the troubled waters:
He destroyeth my soul.
He leadeth me in the paths of wickedness for the effort's sake.
Yea, I shall walk through the valley of poverty and will fear all evil.
For though, Alcohol, art with me.
Thou strippest the table of groceries in the presence of my family.
Thou robbest my head of reason.
My cup of sorrow runneth over.
Surely Alcohol addiction shall stalk me all the days of my life.
And I will dwell in the house of the damned forever.