

Date-rape drug Rohypnol more potent than Valium

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Asst. News Editor

It's tasteless, odorless and blends into your drink. It's 10 times more potent than Valium. Often called roofies, Mexican Valium, or rope, Rohypnol, a central nervous system depressant, is a "date-rape" drug. Gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) is also used as a date rape drug. Known as goop or liquid ecstasy, its effects are similar to those induced by Rohypnol. Both drugs were originally prescribed as sleep aids and relaxants in Europe and Latin America.

Rohypnol can be ingested orally, snorted or injected. Its effects begin within 15 to 20 minutes of ingestion and can last for up to 12 hours. Rohypnol is detectable for up to 72 hours after ingestion. Rohypnol's effects, which are intensified by alcohol, include confusion, drowsiness, nausea, slurred speech, blurred vision, respiratory problems and dizziness. Victims under the influence of Rohypnol often experience amnesia and are unable to resist sexual attacks, earning Rohypnol the nickname of "date-rape drug."

Rohypnol's manufacturer, Hoffman-LaRoche Inc., has increased the dissolving time of the drug to 45 minutes and designed it to form a white film when placed in drinks. The newest version turns drinks a blue color. However, old pills continue to circulate. Popular because of its low cost (about \$5) and difficulty to detect, it is shipped to the United States from foreign countries.

"Most of it [Rohypnol] comes from Mexico," said Dan Ingle, an investigator for Campus Safety and Police.

Kitty Parish, director of health services, asks students to always have a friend with them at social functions.

"It's certainly in the area," she said. "We'd like to think no one on this campus would ever do this — but you never know."

If you feel you have been the victim of date-rape, it is important to go to a health care provider immediately, Parish said.

"If someone is raped because of the drug, we prescribe emergency contraceptives. It is only effective if people are educated because the drug needs to be administered within 120 hours. We have about 85 cases of emergency contraceptives a month," said Pamela Jones, a

field operations coordinator at Planned Parenthood in Greensboro. Jones said it is unclear how many are the result of drug-facilitated rape. Jones also said emergency contraceptives are in the process of becoming over-the-counter drugs.

Drug-facilitated rape is second-degree rape and a Class 'C' felony. If convicted, one can face up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. According to Robert Farb's book on North Carolina crimes, "the statue does not require that the defendant be the one who made the victim mentally incapacitated or physically helpless." Simply put, Ingle said, "If someone spiked your drink and someone else committed the act — the statue still applies."

If you are the victim of rape, you have the right to anonymity.

"Planned Parenthood plays an educator's role in private and personal decision making and maintains a non-judgmental atmosphere," Jones said.

"Peer pressure and social stigmatism causes victims to worry and that's a tragedy itself," Ingle said. "The victim has the right to decide whether to prosecute or not, however, if [medical authorities] suspect drugs, they will contact the authorities."

Because victims generally will wait a lengthy period of time before reporting the crime, there is destruction of physical evidence. This is why it is crucial victims seek help immediately.

"It's a very traumatic experience. I recommend counseling — Crossroads [Sexual Assault Response and Resource Center] is an outstanding organization," Ingle said.

Whenever you attend a function with alcohol present, always take a buddy and never accept a drink from someone you do not know or trust, Ingle said. Never take your eyes off of your drink and contact authorities immediately if you feel you have been victimized.

For more information on Rohypnol or GHB, visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4women.gov/faq/rohypnol.htm>.

If you have been the victim of rape or sexual assault and need help or just need someone to talk to, contact Crossroads at 228-0360.

Contact Ashley Feibish at pendulum@elon.edu or 278-7247.



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