

Drink spiking

To spike a drink means to put alcohol or drugs into someone's drink without their knowledge or permission. Drink spiking can occur wherever drinks are served such as nightclubs, parties, pubs, restaurants and private homes.

Drink spiking is linked to crimes such as sexual assault and robbery. The offender spikes someone else's drink to lower their defences and make it easier to commit a crime. However, the majority of reported drink spiking incidents were not linked to any additional crime and the motive may have been 'prank spiking'.

Drink spiking is illegal, whatever the intent. This means that slipping alcohol or drugs into a friend's drink as a joke is still against the law. People who spike drinks can be charged, fined or jailed.

Examples of drink spiking

The public perception is that drink spiking is limited to slipping drugs into an alcoholic drink. However, drink spiking can include:

- Putting alcohol into a non-alcoholic drink (such as water, soft drink, non-alcoholic punch or fruit juice)
- Adding extra alcohol to an alcoholic drink
- Slipping prescription or illegal drugs (such as tranquillisers, amphetamines, GHB – also called liquid ecstasy) into an alcoholic or non-alcoholic drink.

Perceptions of safety

Victims of drink spiking tend to be women, with the majority of victims aged under 34 years. Studies show that most women are not aware of the dangers of drink spiking. For example:

- Many women do not think they are at risk of drink spiking.
- Travelling to and from a venue, particularly at night, is generally seen as a greater threat to personal safety than drink spiking.
- Once tipsy, some women become blasé about leaving drinks unattended or accepting drinks from strangers.
- A woman may no longer consider an unknown male to be a stranger after talking to him for a while. She is then more likely to accept a drink from him.
- Women tend to judge the risk of drink spiking from the man's personal appearance. However, studies show that men who commit 'drug assisted sexual assault' (DASA) tend to be charming and well groomed.

Safety suggestions

To protect yourself and your friends against drink spiking, safety suggestions include:

- Party with trusted friends. Talk about how you intend to watch out for each other while at the venue.
- Buy your own drinks. Watch the bartender prepare your drink.
- Don't accept any drinks from strangers.
- Accompany the person to the bar if you do wish to accept the offer of a drink from a stranger. Take the drink from the bartender yourself.
- Be wary if a stranger buys you a drink and it's not the type of drink you requested.
- Don't assume that a good looking and charming stranger is trustworthy.

- Don't take your eyes off your drink. If you have to leave the table (to go to the toilet, for example), ask a friend to watch over the drinks.
- Buy drinks that come in bottles with screw-top lids. Carry the bottle in your bag when you go to the toilet or have a dance.
- Don't consume your drink if you think it may have been spiked. Discuss your concerns with the manager or host.
- Tell the manager or host immediately if you see someone spike a drink or if you suspect that drink spiking may be occurring.
- Choose a public place if you are going on a date with someone you don't know very well. Ask a friend to call you during the date to check that everything is okay. Arrange your own way home – for example, catch a taxi or have a friend or family member pick you up after the date.

Symptoms of drink spiking

You may not realise your drink has been spiked by smelling it or tasting it. The substances used to spike drinks are often colourless and odourless. The symptoms depend on many factors such as the substance or mix of substances used; the dose, your size and weight, and how much alcohol you have already consumed. Symptoms could include:

- Feeling drunk, woozy or drowsy
- Feeling drunker than expected
- Mental confusion
- Hallucinations
- Speech difficulties such as slurring
- Memory loss
- Loss of inhibitions
- Nausea and vomiting
- Seizures
- Loss of consciousness
- An unusually long 'hangover'
- A severe hangover when you had little or no alcohol to drink.

How to help your friend

If your friend is showing any of the above symptoms, suggestions include:

- Telling the manager or host what is happening.
- Take your friend to a safe area and stay with them.
- Keep a close eye on their condition. Call an ambulance if their condition deteriorates in any way – for example, if they lose consciousness.
- If you or your friend suspects drink spiking, contact the police or go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital. Urine or blood tests performed within the first 24 hours are able to detect the presence of most drugs.

Report suspected sexual assault

If you suspect sexual assault, contact the police or a sexual assault service, or go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital. Women who are sexually assaulted while intoxicated may shy away from contacting police or asking for professional help because they feel guilt or shame, or are afraid they will not be believed.

It is important to remember that drug-assisted sexual assault, like all sexual assault, is a crime. The police and associated professionals are there to believe you and help you. Seek help even if you can't remember exactly what happened. Some drugs used in drink spiking can induce short-term memory loss.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Police Tel. 000
- Ambulance Tel. 000
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital

- DirectLine Tel. 1800 888 236
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line and Centres against Sexual Assault (CASA) Tel. 1800 806 292
- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service (Australia) Tel. 1800 737 732 – free telephone counselling hotline (24 hours, 7 days)
- 1800RESPECT – for real-time online counselling.
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- Victims of Crime Helpline 1800 819 817

Things to remember

- To spike a drink means to put alcohol or drugs into someone's drink without their knowledge or permission.
- Don't accept drinks from strangers and never leave your drink unattended.
- If you suspect drink spiking or drug-assisted sexual assault, contact the police or a sexual assault service, or go to the casualty department of your nearest hospital.

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