



ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE IN AVIATION

PMA

What is PMA? PMA (para-methoxyamphetamine) is an amphetamine-type drug with both stimulant and hallucinogenic properties.

It has no medical use. Its effects are similar to those of MDMA (ecstasy), although PMA is much more potent and far more toxic. The chemical precursors of PMA and MDMA are different.

PMA and safety

Little research evidence exists regarding the safety impact of PMA. The drug has been linked to a number of Australian deaths over the years. Six people died in South Australia between September 1995 and January 1996 after taking PMA, either alone or combined with MDMA. All indications are that the users believed they were taking MDMA alone and did not realise that PMA was present in the tablet they consumed.

Long-term and short-term effects of PMA

The toxicity of PMA is related to excessive central nervous system stimulation. Users may experience hallucinations, delirium, restlessness, agitation, muscle contractions, thrashing around, rigidity, sweating, high fever, seizures, coma and death. It has been estimated that PMA's effects can be seen after consuming approximately 50 mg of the drug. An ecstasy tablet can weigh anything from 150–200 mg and can contain up to 50 per cent of active material, so it may not take many PMA tablets to lead to significant health issues.

Ingesting a dose of PMA of less than 50 mg without other drugs or alcohol induces symptoms similar to MDMA. These effects may include:

- increased pulse rate and blood pressure
- increased and laboured respiration
- elevated body temperature
- erratic eye movements
- muscle spasms
- nausea
- heightened visual stimulation.

Doses over 50 mg are considered potentially lethal, especially when taken with other drugs, such as amphetamine derivatives, cannabis, cocaine, prescription medications like fluoxetine (Prozac), and alcohol. Higher doses may produce:

- cardiac arrhythmia and arrest
- breathing problems
- pulmonary congestion
- renal failure
- hyperthermia
- vomiting
- convulsions
- coma
- death.

Aviation workplace requirements

In accordance with Civil Aviation Safety Regulation Part 99, personnel who perform, or are available to perform, safety-sensitive aviation activities are subject to random alcohol and other drug (ADO) testing. Testing may be conducted to detect the presence of amphetamines and amphetamine-type stimulants above the permitted level.

For testable drugs, the permitted level is a concentration of the testable drug in 100 mls of blood that is less than the confirmatory target concentration for that drug specified in Table 5.1 of the Australian Standard 4760–2006.

The aim of the testing program is preventative, not punitive. However, the regulations provide for a suitable enforcement regime to deal with personnel whose tests return confirmed readings over the permitted levels for drugs or alcohol.

Community support services

Alcohol and Drug Information Service

Each state and territory has an AOD information telephone service. Many operate 24 hours and offer a free-call number for people living in regional areas.

Australian Capital Territory
24 Hour Alcohol and Drug Telephone Line
02 6207 9977

New South Wales
Alcohol and Drug Information Service
02 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599 (rural)

Northern Territory
Alcohol and Drug Information Service
1800 131 350

Queensland
Alcohol and Drug Information Service
07 3236 2414 or 1800 177 833 (rural)

South Australia
Alcohol and Drug Information Service
1300 13 13 40

Tasmania
Alcohol and Drug Information Service
1800 811 994 (24 hour)

Victoria
DirectLine
1800 888 236

DrugInfo
1300 85 85 84

Family Drug Helpline
1300 660 068

Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS Line)
03 9418 1020 or 1800 014 446 (rural)

Western Australia
Alcohol and Drug Information Service
08 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (rural)

Parent Drug Information Service
08 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (rural)

CASA contacts
CASA has established a virtual resource centre on AOD in the Australian aviation sector, providing comprehensive policy and program advice, resources for education and training purposes, self-assessment tools, links to useful documents and services, and a range of other materials. The website can be found at www.casa.gov.au/aod.

CASA AOD Program Manager
The Program Manager for the CASA AOD initiative can be contacted at aod@casa.gov.au.