

# Cocaine – the new drug of the people?

## NEWSLETTER

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### Faster than pizza

**In Berlin, Vienna, London and other cities across Europe, 30% of users can now get cocaine delivered to their doors faster than pizza, a global study has found<sup>1</sup>. European consumption of the drug has been on the rise for a number of years. This trend is explained by increasing production in South America and easy availability. Recent data indicates that more than 140 tonnes of cocaine were seized in Europe in 2017 – a doubling of the figure for 2016<sup>2</sup>.**

Though it was once considered an elite drug, cocaine use is no longer confined to “high society”. A price drop and easy access have paved the way for coke to become a drug of the people. For example, there are hundreds of daily calls to cocaine “delivery services” in Berlin alone.

Cocaine is an insidious drug that quickly creates a severe psychological dependence. Its consumption produces an immediate high within just 20 to 60 minutes (depending on the form in which

#### Infobox: Cocaine – what exactly is it?

Cocaine is harvested from the leaves of the coca plant, indigenous to South America. Various processing stages produce a white, crystalline powder. Depending on how this is processed further, it is available as coke or crack and is snorted through the nose, smoked or injected intravenously. Cocaine has an intoxicating effect and produces a numbing sensation on the mucous membranes. Possession and sale of cocaine are prohibited under narcotics legislation and are liable to prosecution.

it is taken), associated with intense feelings of euphoria. This gives way to a phase of fatigue and tiredness, with the user craving another kick.

Both phases of the effects of cocaine are dangerous, especially when driving a motor vehicle. During the stimulating, euphoric stage, the user reacts with overconfidence and aggression. Meanwhile, during the end phase, drivers are at risk of falling asleep at the wheel.

DrugWipe 6 S saliva test – reliable detection of cocaine and 5 other drugs





The short duration of the cocaine high is reflected in the concentration gradient in the blood. The body breaks cocaine down relatively quickly into benzoylecgonine (BZE), its major metabolite\*. This breakdown process continues after blood is taken and as the blood sample makes its way to the lab. However, this reaction can be delayed by using suitable blood collection tubes (containing fluoride or oxalate) and refrigerating the sample. Despite these measures, some degree of degradation is still inevitable. For this reason, it is important to get the blood sample to the lab as quickly as possible.

The instability of cocaine in the blood is the reason why BZE is listed alongside cocaine as the only non-psychoactive metabolite in the appendix to Section 24a of the German Road Traffic Act (Strassenverkehrsgesetz, StVG).

The detection of BZE is also useful for a second reason, especially in the context of roadside testing. During the final phase of the effects of cocaine, known as the "crash" or "comedown", it is mainly BZE that circulates through the body. In this phase, the user still represents a risk to road traffic. This is why DrugWipe detects both cocaine and BZE.

**DrugWipe® for the reliable detection of cocaine on surfaces and skin and in saliva.  
Please contact us for more information.**

#### Infobox: A lethal mixture – cocaine and alcohol

Mixing cocaine and alcohol, while very popular, is very dangerous. The drug reduces the user's awareness of the effects of alcoholic beverages. Those who take both tend to feel a lot less drunk than they actually are. At the same time, rising blood alcohol levels following cocaine consumption lead to increased risk-taking and emotional instability. Mixed users therefore attract attention more often due to their aggressive behaviour and inaccurate self-perception. Both are extremely risky when driving.

The physical effects of consuming a combination of cocaine and alcohol include circulatory collapse, loss of consciousness, heart attack and stroke. The risk of alcohol poisoning is also elevated due to the user's limited perception of his/her own blood alcohol level. The psychological effects of consuming alcohol and cocaine at the same time include hallucinations and perceptual disturbances. Suicidal ideation, psychosis and mood swings are also common.

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Global Drug Survey, London

<sup>2</sup> European Drug Report 2019, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Lisbon/Portugal

\*A metabolite is an intermediate product in a biochemical metabolic pathway.

#### Securetec Detektions-Systeme AG

Lilienthalstraße 7  
85579 Neubiberg  
Germany  
P +49 89 203080-1651  
F +49 89 203080-1652  
info@securetec.net  
www.securetec.net

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