

**K. E. Champion, N. C. Newton & M. Teesson**

NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use  
National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia



### BACKGROUND

- Although the prevalence of ecstasy use among Australian teenagers is relatively low, (2% had used in past 12 months in 2011)<sup>1</sup>, for those who do use ecstasy, the potential for harm is considerable.
- Ecstasy use is associated with a range of serious adverse effects and early initiation to substance use is a risk factor for juvenile offending, poor academic performance, delinquency and school drop-out<sup>2,3</sup>.
- In recent times, there has been growing concern about the availability of **new and emerging drugs**, and the potential risks associated with their use.

### What are New and Emerging Drugs (NEDs) and why prevent?

Substances that are not under international control

Are designed to mimic the effects of existing illicit substances e.g. ecstasy, LSD, cannabis

Also called 'emerging psychoactive substances', 'synthetic drugs', 'legal highs', 'bath salts', 'research chemicals'



Often marketed as 'legal highs', which misleads people into thinking they are low-risk and safe

Very little is known about their toxicology & effects, especially in the long term

Are emerging at an unprecedented rate (73 new substances in 2012)<sup>4</sup>

⇒ There is huge potential for young people to misuse these substances

- The United Nations and other international bodies have highlighted the need to educate adolescents about NEDs through drug prevention programs<sup>5</sup>. However, no evidence-based program currently exist that specifically target the growing phenomenon and use of NEDs.
- To fill this gap, the *Climate Schools* model for school-based prevention, which has been found to reduce harmful alcohol and cannabis use in adolescents<sup>6,7</sup>, will be extended to the prevention of ecstasy and NEDs. Given that NEDs are sometimes sold in pill form and are often designed to imitate the psychoactive effects of ecstasy (MDMA), prevention for these substances will be delivered simultaneously.

### Aim of the current study:

To evaluate whether the *Climate Schools: Ecstasy and Emerging Drugs Module*, a universal school-based prevention program, is more effective than a control group in:

- 1) increasing ecstasy- and NED-related knowledge
- 2) reducing intentions to use ecstasy and NEDs
- 3) preventing the uptake and reducing the use of ecstasy and NEDs

### METHODS

#### Developing the *Climate Schools: Ecstasy and Emerging Drugs Module*

- In 2013, the existing *Climate Schools: Ecstasy Module* was modified to incorporate new content about NEDs, to reflect the most recent prevalence data from Australia, and to ensure language and content was relevant and acceptable to teenagers today.
- This led to the addition of an extra cartoon lesson, resulting in a four-lesson school-based prevention program for ecstasy and NEDs called the *Climate Schools: Ecstasy and Emerging Drugs Module*.
- Focus testing was conducted with students (n=7) and health professionals working in the field of drug and alcohol (n=6).



#### What does the *Climate Schools: Ecstasy and Emerging Drugs Module* look like?

- Consists of **four x 40-min lessons**, delivered to **Year 10 students** during PDHPE classes at school.
- Each lesson is delivered via the internet and contains a 20-minute **online cartoon** about a group of teenagers and their experiences with ecstasy and NEDs, followed by **class activities** (online and teacher-delivered).
- Includes interactive components to engage students and encourage critical thinking and decision making.
- Lesson content includes:**
  - What are NEDs? What is ecstasy?
  - Legal does not mean safe
  - Prevalence and acceptability of use among teenagers
  - Social, financial and health issues associated with use
  - Saying no to drugs – effective communication skills



### How do we think the program will have an effect?

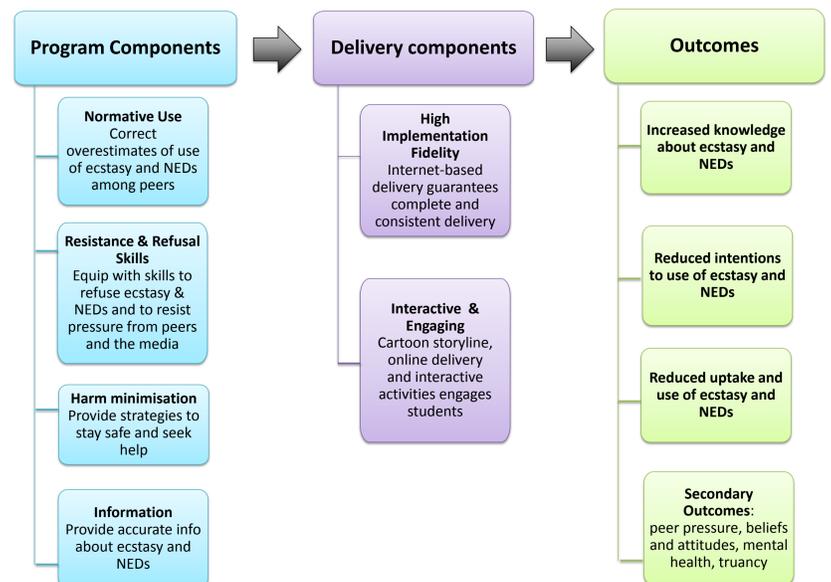


Figure 1. Logic Model for the *Climate Schools: Ecstasy and Emerging Drugs Module*

### How will we evaluate the program?

- A cluster RCT will be conducted among Year 10 students (n=900) from 12 schools in Sydney between 2014 and 2016.
- Schools will be randomly assigned to the *Climate Schools* intervention group or to the control group (see Figure 2).
- Students will complete five self-report questionnaires over the course of the study (see Table 1).
- The survey will be completed online and will measure:
  - Ecstasy and NED-related knowledge
  - Intentions to use ecstasy and NEDs
  - Patterns of ecstasy and NED use (synthetic cannabis & synthetic cathinones)
  - Secondary outcomes: beliefs/attitudes about ecstasy and NEDs, mental health, peer pressure resistance, truancy, other substance use

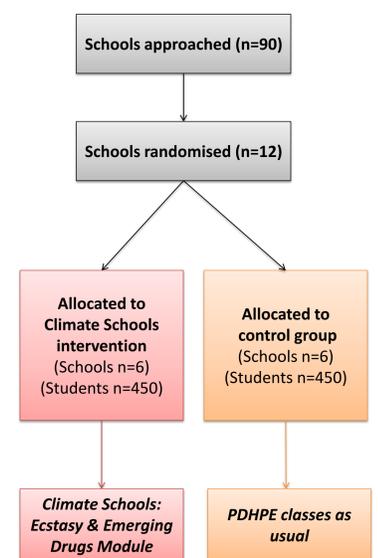


Figure 2. Anticipated recruitment and allocation of schools

Table 1: Assessment and Intervention Timeline

	Baseline Survey	Climate Schools Intervention	Immediate Post-test	6 month F/U	12 month F/U	24 month F/U
Time	Term 1 2014	Term 1 2014	Term 1 2014	Term 3 2014	Term 1 2015	Term 1 2016
Grade	Year 10	Year 10	Year 10	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Age	15-16yrs	15-16yrs	15-16yrs	15-16yrs	16-17yrs	17-18yrs
CO	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
CL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

CO=Control Group; CL=Climate Schools Intervention group

### CONCLUSIONS

- To our knowledge, this will be the first evaluation of an internet-based program designed to specifically target ecstasy and NED use among adolescents.
- If deemed effective, the *Climate Schools: Ecstasy and Emerging Drugs Module* will provide schools with an interactive and novel prevention program that can be readily implemented by teachers, and that has the potential to minimise the burden of disease, social costs, and disability associated with ecstasy and NED misuse.

### References

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### Contact & Acknowledgements

The CSI Study is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Government Department of Health & Ageing (DoHA). For more information please contact **Katrina Champion** [k.champion@unsw.edu.au](mailto:k.champion@unsw.edu.au) or visit [www.csistudy.org.au](http://www.csistudy.org.au)

