

Teens the target of new app designed to prevent drug use

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Australian researchers have worked with local high school students to create a unique interactive drug education game for Australian teenagers.

Called *Pure Rush*, the game is targeted at students in Years 8 to 10 and aims to inform adolescents about the potential harms of cannabis, methamphetamine, hallucinogens and pills such as ecstasy. The aim of the game is to avoid (jump over) illicit drugs to reach a music festival in as fast a time as possible.

Researchers from the Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use (CREMS), a consortium led by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at UNSW, interviewed over 100 high school students in five schools across Sydney and Perth to learn what game features they enjoy. These were combined with evidence-based drug prevention strategies to create *Pure Rush*.

The game differs from the handful of existing drug education games in its use of the popular “race” genre rather than role playing; its emphasis on interactive learning, with characters experiencing the effects of any illicit drugs they collide with (e.g. cannabis slows them down); and its inclusion of Australian landscapes and animals.

Pure Rush also reminds teens they are in the majority if they choose not to take illicit drugs. [The latest survey of Australian secondary school students in 2011](#) showed 7.7% of students aged 12-17 years had used an illicit substance in the past month, while 15.6% had used one in their lifetime.

Director of CREMS and NHMRC Principal Research Fellow, Professor Maree Teesson, said drug education is most effective when it is active and engaging.

“Educational games like *Pure Rush* are an exciting development because they can engage students who don’t respond to traditional drug education.

“Research has shown that most 12-17 year old Australians do not use illicit drugs, but many adolescents will be faced with a situation where they will have to make a choice about using cannabis, or ecstasy, or other drugs.

“This game is all about letting teenagers know there are potential harms associated with illicit drug use and that if they choose to abstain, they’re in the majority.”

Pure Rush is free and optimised for play as an app, available through [Google Play](#) and [iTunes](#), and can also be [played online](#). The game has four levels, takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and is suitable to be incorporated into a high school lesson plan. Drug education booklets to accompany the game have also been developed for students, parents and teachers.

Pure Rush is just one of a number of drug prevention resources developed by CREMS. To view additional resources please visit <http://comorbidity.edu.au/cre-resources>.

The game was built by developers 2and2, and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

How the game works

Players commence racing to reach the music festival. They must jump over illicit drugs in their path. They can collect stars for extra health points.



Players who choose to avoid illicit drugs receive reinforcing messages.



If players collide with illicit drugs, they lose health points, and experience effects such as slowed reaction time or erratic jumping which impair game play. If all health points are lost, players must begin the level again. Messages about the illicit drugs that cost them health points are displayed.



Avoiding drugs is the key to succeeding in the game and reaching the music festival in the fastest time. Players can compare best time with each other, and are reminded that choosing to abstain from illicit drug use is the norm.



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The Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use (CREMS) was funded in 2012 by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council to investigate the co-occurrence of mental disorders and substance use disorders.

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