



Men who have sex with men and chemsex

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Name of drug	Street names	Delivery
Mephedrone	Meow Meow, MCAT, plant food	Snorted as a powder, injected or administered rectally
GHB/GBL	G, Gina, liquid ecstasy	Swallowed in small liquid doses
Crystal meth	Crystal, Ice, Tina, T	Snorted as powder, smoked in glass pipe, or administered rectally

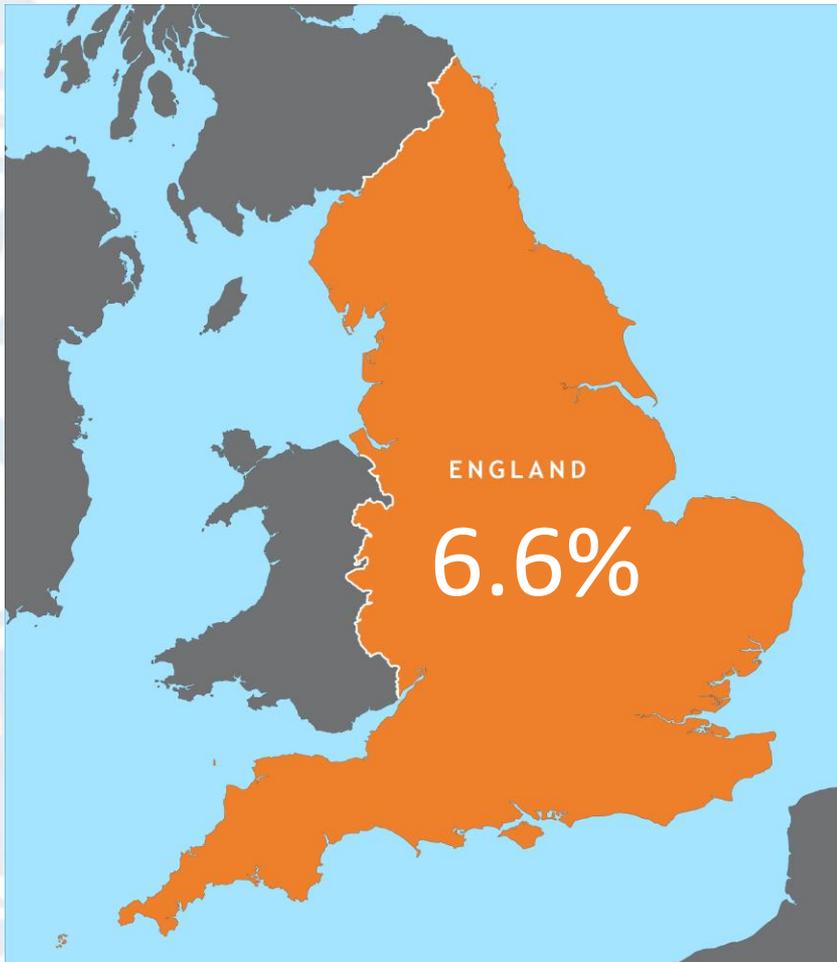
Chemsex: “Sex between men that occurs under the influence of [these] drugs taken immediately preceding and/or during the sexual session”

How common is chemsex?

- Gay Men’s Sex Survey 2014
- Online recruitment via social and sexual networking sites
- Total sample of 15,360 MSM

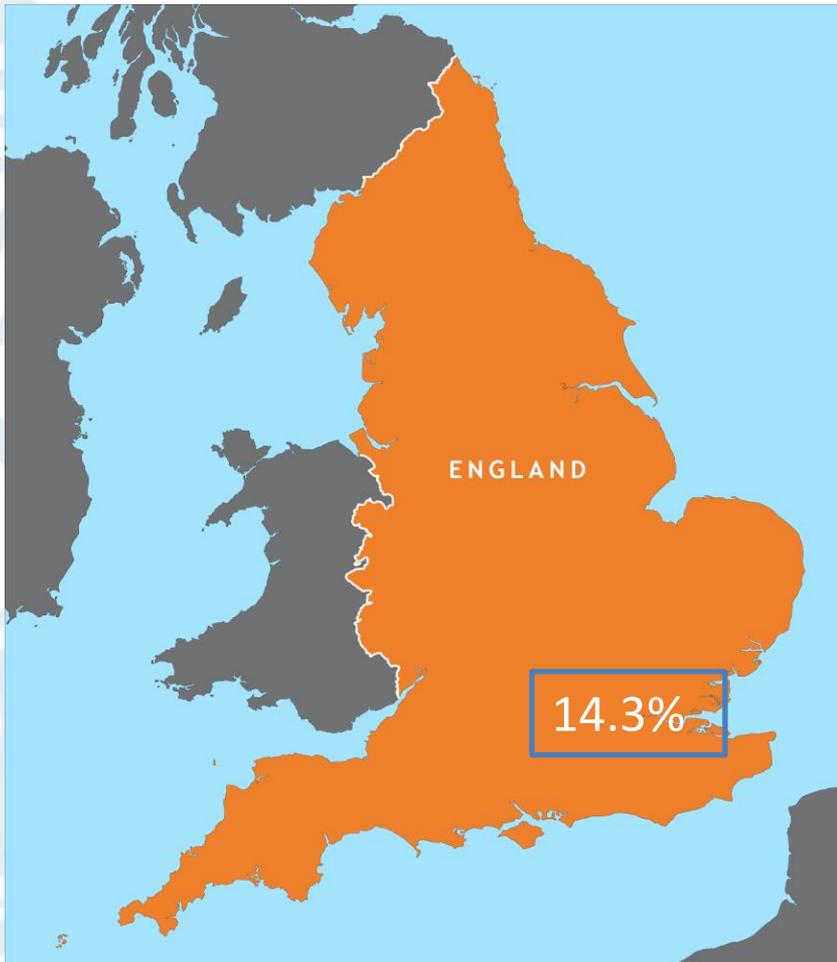
	Use in last 4 wks, entire England sample (%)	Use in the last 4 wks, England (%)		Use in the last 4 wks, England (%)	
		Rest of England	London	Not diagnosed positive	Diagnosed HIV positive
Cocaine	6.6	5.3	10.4	6.0	12.9
Ecstasy	5.7	4.6	8.8	5.3	10.0
Mephedrone	5.3	3.2	11.6	4.1	17.4
GHB/GBL	3.2	1.5	8.2	2.2	13.0
Crystal meth	2.0	1.0	4.9	1.2	10.4

How common is chemsex?



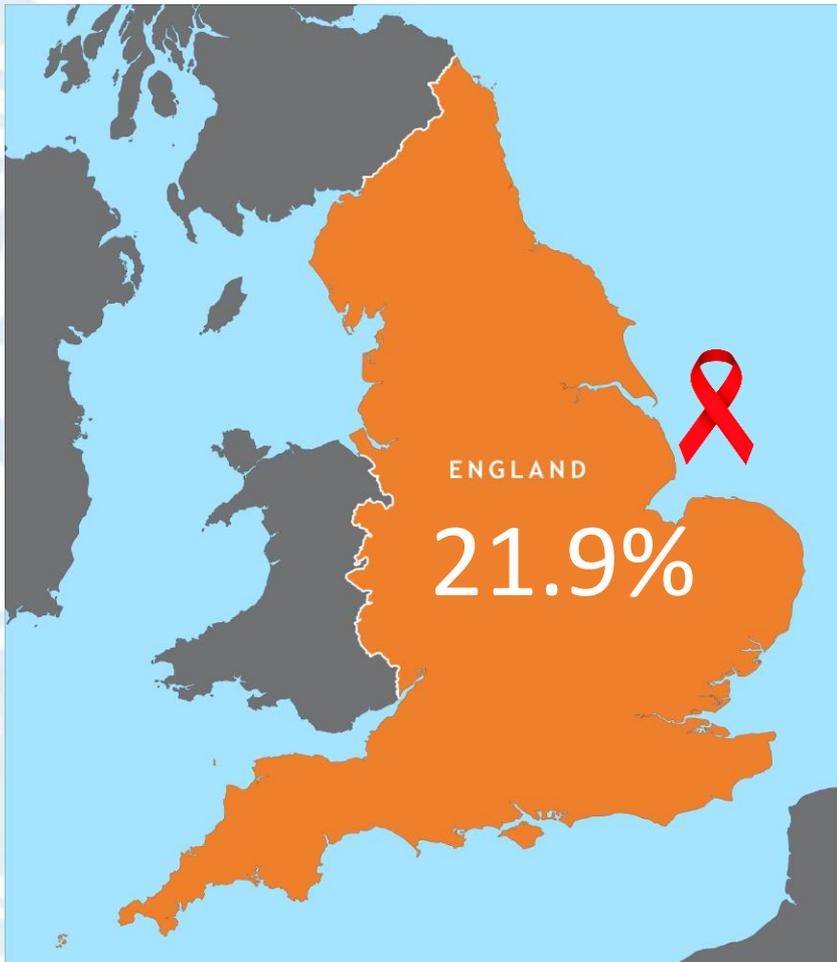
- Use of chemsex drugs (crystal, GHB/GBL or mephedrone) within previous 4 weeks:
 - For all respondents across all of England: **6.6%**

How common is chemsex?



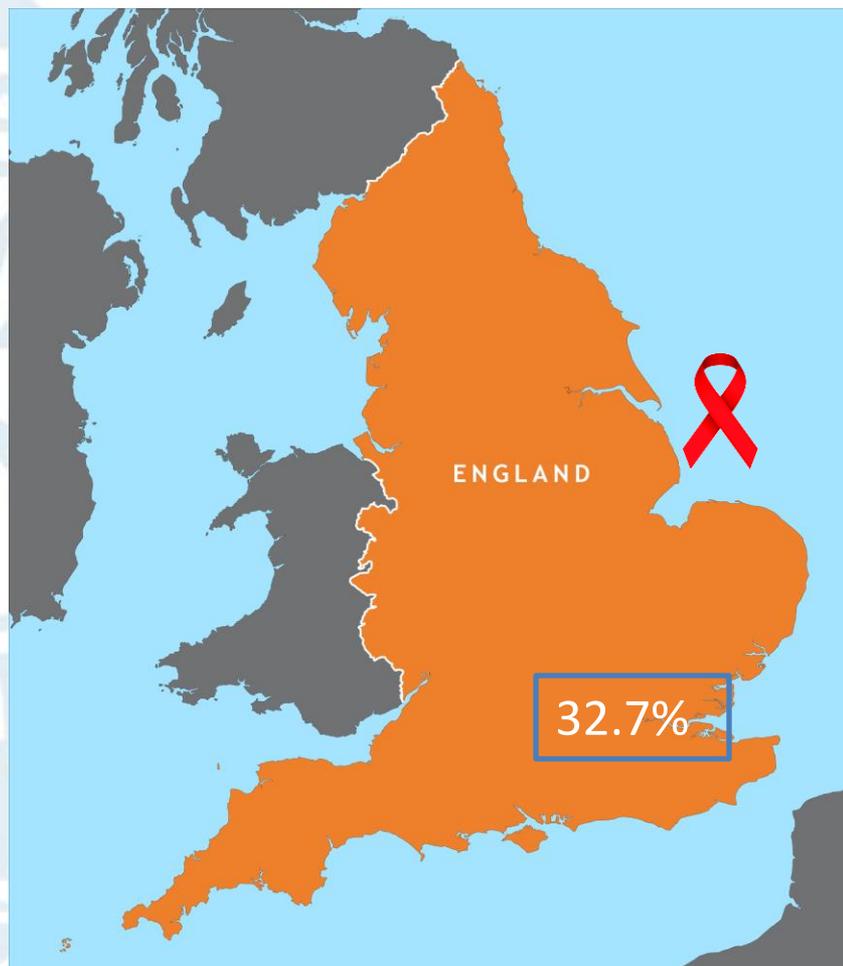
- Use of chemsex drugs (crystal, GHB/GBL or mephedrone) within previous 4 weeks:
 - For respondents living in London: **14.3%**

How common is chemsex?



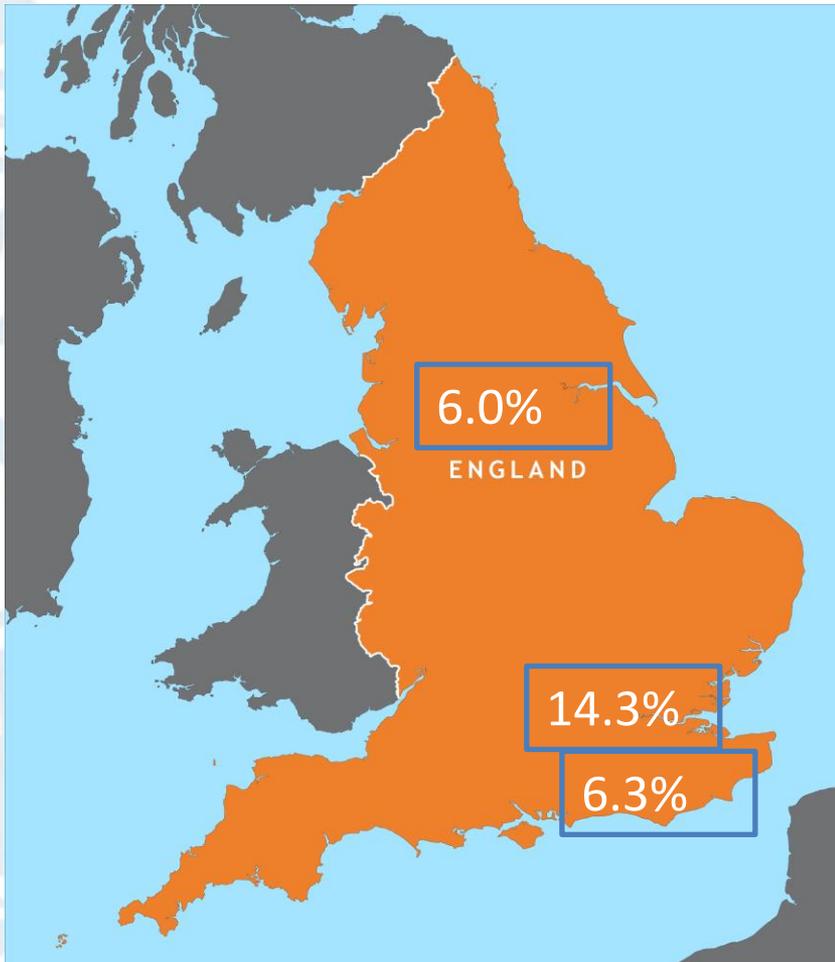
- Use of chemsex drugs (crystal, GHB/GBL or mephedrone) within previous 4 weeks:
 - For HIV positive respondents across all of England: **21.9%**

How common is chemsex?



- Use of chemsex drugs (crystal, GHB/GBL or mephedrone) within previous 4 weeks:
 - For HIV positive respondents living in London: 32.7%

How common is chemsex?



- Greater Manchester: 896 MSM
 - 6% had used crystal, GHB/GBL or mephedrone within previous 4 weeks

Personal and social context

- ↑ cost, ↓ quality of ecstasy and cocaine
- Mephedrone and GHB/GBL cheap and widely accessible
- Injection of mephedrone and/or crystal meth reported by one third
- Access and uptake for sex facilitated by GPS sexual networking apps
- Wide spread access and use in gay male sex-on-premises venues

Meanings and motivations

- **Facilitating sexual confidence**
- *I have never really been able to have sober gay sex and then I think eventually what happened was crystal meth, and getting so out of control. There was then all the guilt about what I was doing on the drugs. I could not escape from this cycle of guilt around sex and the drugs. And it just goes backwards and forwards. [Aged 24, last tested HIV negative]*

Meanings and motivations

- Facilitating sexual confidence
- **Increased sexual desire and libido**
- *“I don’t have a sex drive any longer. It’s one of the reasons why I started slamming chems because when I slam, I get horny.” [Aged 53, diagnosed HIV positive]*

Meanings and motivations

- Facilitating sexual confidence
- Increased sexual desire and libido
- **Enabling sexual longevity and partner turnover**
- *“So for me and this guy, we would smoke it [crystal] together and literally just fuck him for 12 hours, non-stop and it was brilliant. It was just – you feel super human, he can take it and take it. You give it and give it.” [Aged 40, last tested negative]*

Meanings and motivations

- Facilitating sexual confidence
- Increased sexual desire and libido
- Enabling sexual longevity and partner turnover
- **Facilitating sexual adventure**
- *“The thing about crystal is it desensitises you so that you can do stuff you wouldn’t normally do. [...] Fisting. Double fisting. How much can I get up their arse? If you didn’t have any of those drugs, your body would be feeling stuff and you wouldn’t be able to do such extreme things.” [Aged 48, diagnosed HIV positive]*

Drugs and sexual risk taking



- Particularly complex relationship but falls into 3 main groups

1. **Strict maintenance of safer sex behaviour**

- Nearly a quarter of men had strict rules about condom use
- Took drugs but little evidence of risky sex

2. Pre-determined unprotected anal intercourse

- A quarter of men had decided to (nearly) always have sex without condoms
- All were HIV positive
- All had condomless sex with men they believed to also be positive
- Drug use played minor role in action of STI risk, but did play major role in facilitating sex with more men and for longer



3. Unintended sexual risk under the influence of drugs

- A third of men had engaged in unintentional sexual risk behaviour
- Drugs had myopic effect
- Drugs could be cognitively incapacitating
- *I try to have protected sex but the thing is that when you're in a euphoric state, things happen. You might not be totally aware of what actually people are doing [to you] because you are that fucked. [Aged 50, last tested HIV negative]*

Sexual health of participants

- Two HIV positive men attributed their status to chemsex
- More than a third had STI diagnosis in previous year
- Widespread reporting of penile abrasions and rectal fissures
- Mixed feelings about extent of sexual satisfaction or happiness
- *“It [chemsex] can get a bit lonely after a while when it’s just fuck and go, fuck and go, fuck and go. It’s not as if anyone stays the night anymore. That’s just the lay of the land these days.” [Aged 41, diagnosed HIV positive]*

Chemsex & broader well-being

- **Impact on mental health**
 - Anxiety attacks
 - Acute paranoia
 - Sexual dependency
- **Impact on physical health**
 - Overdose
 - Disturbed sleeping problems
 - Injection site injuries
 - Sexual consent concerns

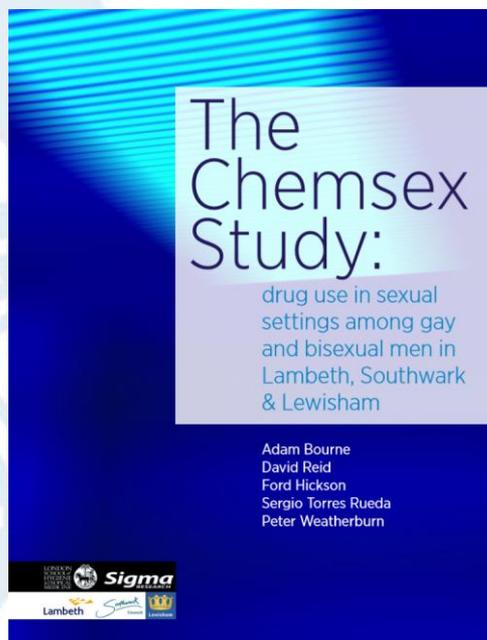
“I think really it goes with the situation, it goes with the territory [...] Some people are giving consent but I mean is it really consent when someone is literally on the verge of passing out?”

Conclusions

- Changing nature of drug use among MSM in the UK
- Motivations for using drugs with sex are complex and require targeted, individual support
- Relationship between drug use and sexual risk is not causal and we should be wary of making simplistic assumptions
- HIV and STI transmission existed before emergence of chemsex
- Research required to quantify extent of harm, interaction with sexual risk behaviour, and evaluate effective interventions

Acknowledgements

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Chemsex study outputs

Journal articles

Bourne et al (2015) “Chemsex” and harm reduction need among gay men in South London. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 26(12), 1171-1176.

Bourne et al (2015) Illicit drug use in sexual settings (“Chemsex”) and HIV/STI transmission risk behaviour among gay men in South London: findings from a qualitative study. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 91(8), 564-568.

Weatherburn P, Hickson F, Reid D, Torres-Rueda S, Bourne A (2016) Motivations and values associated with combining sex and illicit drugs (‘chemsex’) among gay men in South London: findings from a qualitative study. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, published online first, doi:10.1136/sextrans-2016-052695.

Community report

South London Chemsex study: www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/chemsex