



FDA warns about mix-it-yourself drugs

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Michael Tiedemann was pretty prompt for a 15-year-old, so when his blaring alarm clock and a friend's phone call didn't rouse him for school, his stepfather got a bad feeling.

When he opened the bedroom door, he found Michael dead.

Just lying there in bed, a kind of white froth at his lips and nose the only clue to why he died.

An easy-to-get or mix-it-yourself drug, a growing craze for teens and young adults, killed Michael, who was described by his parents as an honor-roll student who loved karate and wanted to become a doctor.

The drug GHB is luring even people who insist they'd never touch "real drugs" like cocaine, who say it provides that relaxed,

uninhibited feeling of a few drinks but faster, cheaper and without the telltale alcohol smell.

But GHB, usually sold as a colorless and odorless liquid but sometimes as a powder, is dangerous. It causes sudden comas and seizures. Originally developed as a surgical anesthetic, it depresses breathing.

Hospitals from Maryland to Colorado are reporting GHB poisonings suddenly rising in the past year. Nobody really keeps count, but the government estimates at least 32 people have died and 3,500 others have needed treatment for overdoses since 1990.

The coroner determined Michael vomited while in a deep, GHB-induced sleep and consequently, unable to awaken or turn over as he could during normal sleep, suffocated.

His parents told Michael's story in hopes others will heed GHB's dangers, but they contend even Michael's classmates in Fort

Pierce, Fla., still use the drug.

"They just don't think it will happen to them," said his mother, Debbie Alumbaugh. "If we can get this through to the kids, and one more child does not die, then our child will not have died for nothing."

Some teens say they were never warned. "You tell us about marijuana and alcohol every day. You should have told us about GHB," a Michigan teen-ager told school officials there last spring after a 15-year-old classmate also died from GHB.

Body builders first abused GHB in the early '90s. Then, easy to slip into drinks, it became a date-rape drug.

Today, it's the latest trend, touted as a party drug or even a sex enhancer.

"It is something that just doesn't seem to go away," says John Taylor of the Food and Drug Administration, which banned the

drug's sale nationwide in 1991.

Just this year, the FDA has seized or ordered destroyed thousands of vials of GHB sold under such names as Invigorate, Longevity and Blue Nitro, shut down companies that sold GHB-mixing kits on the Internet, and begun prosecuting distributors.

But the FDA can crack down only on makers or distributors. Twenty states make GHB possession by an individual illegal, and Congress is debating a similar federal law. But enforcement varies widely; Florida is one of those states, but Michael Tiedemann's parents complain the police never could ferret out who gave him GHB.

GHB is hard to stop, because people can mix up quarts at a kitchen sink. Recipes abound on the Internet. All it takes are some common chemicals; the main ingredient is a paint thinner.

One Internet recipe recommends storing GHB in glass in the refrigerator, a very dangerous recommendation because it's so easy to confuse with water. A Tennessee woman died in June after apparently unknowingly drinking GHB from a water bottle in a friend's car.

But experts say most people willingly use GHB, hunting a quick high. It's de rigeur on some nightclub scenes, where GHB's potency is made far worse by alcohol.

"It's very easy to overdose," warns Sandra Frazier of the University of Alabama, Birmingham, whose emergency room in a single week treated six people in their 20s for GHB poisonings at area nightclubs.

Indeed, because one GHB batch can differ greatly from the next, a dose that gave you a mild buzz one day could kill you the next, Frazier warns.

Bush responds to drug questions

BY RON FOURNIER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

George W. Bush is the front runner for the Republican nomination for president. He is currently the governor of Texas.

WASHINGTON — Why now? For months, George W. Bush successfully dodged questions about whether he used drugs with an artful reply that he acted irresponsibly in his youth.

His sudden decision to offer partial, unsatisfying answers is baffling.

The hubbub over have-you-ever questions squandered momentum Bush had built with a convincing victory in Iowa's straw poll last Saturday. It also exposed weaknesses

that were ignored or unnoticed while his campaign rocketed almost effortlessly to the top of the Republican field.

The shift of strategy left veteran political consultants shaking their heads.

"He didn't need to be talking about this," said Ed Gillespie, a Republican operative. Even supporters who commended Bush for talking about the subject said he did so clumsily.

By Friday, he was back on message and would only say: "I told the American people that years ago I made some mistakes. I've learned from those mistakes."

After Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle suggested that Bush's background was getting less scrutiny than President Clinton's, the questions about drugs started picking up. News organizations surveyed the other candidates about past drug usage. Bush alone refused to answer.

Though there is no evidence or credible allegation that he has ever violated drug laws, Bush kept getting peppered with the questions. He finally lost his cool during a home state news conference. Leveling dark accusations against unnamed rivals who "planted" the rumors, Bush vowed not to answer the questions. "The people of America are sick and tired of this kind of politics," he said. "And I'm not participating."

Hours later, he decided to participate, after all.

The Dallas Morning News wanted to know if he could answer the question posed to federal employees in standard background checks: Did he use illegal drugs in the last seven years?

Bush sought clarification of the question, which a senior adviser later said was confusing. That gave him a little time to consider whether to reply — and how to frame his answer.

The adviser, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Bush decided it was fair to expect a presidential candidate to answer the same question posed to federal employees. He also felt it would be a political benefit to put some distance between his campaign and any "mistakes" he refuses to talk about. And, finally, Bush assumed the headlines would be that he was committed to federal background checks and would live by the same standards.

The Bush team was surprised the next day when news reports focused on him saying he hadn't used illegal drugs in seven years. That left open the possibility that he had broken the law when his father was in the White House.

A news conference Thursday allowed Bush to cast any past drug usage as a more distant memory. He used a more stringent 15-year standard set by the Bush White House.

The news conference also gave television networks footage of Bush calmly discussing the matter, replacing the heated exchange networks had on videotape from the day before.

In his opening remarks, Bush said he could meet the anti-drug standards of his father's White House. At least one top aide thought that meant he was ruling out drug usage for the last 15 years.

When a reporter asked whether he could have passed the test when his father was president, Bush said yes. That was the first clue for some aides that Bush was going back 25 years.

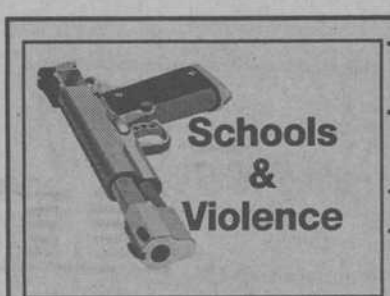
It raised more questions. What about when his father was vice president?

Why not answer the question posed to current White House employees? The FBI asks them if they used drugs since their 18th birthday.

Bush said he must draw the line somewhere.

Aides insist that will be the last Bush will say about the matter. But he has already redrawn the lines. Seven years. Fifteen years. Twenty-five years.

Bush might be able to finesse the drug issue throughout the campaign, political consultants in both parties say. But the episode revealed what can happen to a cautious, coached candidate when he is knocked off message; he changed course twice in two days, lost his cool and is still open to accusations that he won't play by the rules set for White House workers.

BY DAVID GERMAIN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Miramax Films picked the worst possible time, back-to-school season, to release "Teaching Mrs. Tingle," a black comedy about teens who hold their mean-spirited teacher hostage, education groups say.

The movie's Friday opening comes four days after classes resumed at Columbine High School in Colorado for the first time since two students gunned down 12 schoolmates and a teacher and wounded 23 others before killing themselves last spring.

"The timing is really unfortunate," said Kathleen Lyons, spokeswoman for the National Education Association. "We find it appalling that Miramax would release a movie about kids hunting down teachers."

Miramax did not immediately return phone calls from The Associated Press, but sent a fax detailing the plot and a comment from first-time director Kevin Williamson, who has written several horror screenplays, including "Scream" and "I Know What You Did Last Summer."

"I hope audiences find this movie to be funny, wicked and incredibly entertaining, but in addition I hope they take away the idea that we have all had bad experiences that can later become assets in life. You can turn the tables," he said.

Movie release found 'appalling'

"Mrs. Tingle" stars Helen Mirren as a malevolent teacher who is kidnapped by three students. Originally called "Killing Mrs. Tingle," the movie's title was toned down after the Columbine shootings. The teacher is not killed, although she's injured and several scenes involve a menacing crossbow.

Since Columbine, the entertainment industry has faced criticism that the violence in films, television and video games contributes to real-life violence. President Clinton and Congress have appealed to Hollywood to show more restraint.

"There's a lot of talk about Hollywood's role in this atmosphere of school violence," said David Griffith, director of governmental and public affairs for the National Association of State Boards of Education. "This is turning a tin ear to pick the worst time to put this movie out."

The criticism may boost the box office for "Mrs. Tingle," which has not caught much advance attention from moviegoers, said Robert Bucksbaum, a film analyst for Reel Source Inc.

The movie is a fairly harmless movie and has a happy ending, quipped Bucksbaum, who saw it at an advance screening.

"If anything, teachers do have a right to go crazy about this movie because they're not represented well by Helen Mirren's character," Bucksbaum said. "She really is the worst of the worst."

State law requires use of courtesy titles in schools

BY NATALIE GOTT
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS — Students who fail to address their teachers with courtesy titles will be disciplined under a state law taking effect when classes start this year, but many school officials have yet to decide just how mete out the punishment.

Believed to be the first in the nation mandating respectful conversation, the law requires students in kindergarten through fifth grade to address teachers and other school employees as "ma'am" or "sir," or to use the appropriate titles, like Mr. or Ms.

Each of the state's 66 public school systems is supposed to decide how to punish impolite students. The law's only restriction on school officials saying that they can't expel or suspend violators.

New Orleans schools have a committee looking into policy changes but it has not settled on anything, even with classes starting Thursday, said spokesman Walt Pierce.

"We just received the legislative update and we will bring it up," said Beaure-

gard Superintendent Joe Aguillard.

He said he does not expect the law to be difficult to enforce, thanks to a program it already set up a few years back to teach students about respect.

Bossier Parish also does not anticipate any problems because of its Care to Education program, which encourages students to respect their teachers, administrators, and each other on a daily basis, said Betty McCauley, director of student services.

Some schools have established disciplinary guidelines.

East Baton Rouge Parish schools adopted a policy that will consider a violation of the rule as a minor offense. That means teachers will warn the students first. If the problem continues, they will contact the parent by telephone or request a conference. Notes will be sent to the student's parents if the problem persists.

"Students should not be forced to say it, but they should follow the rules," said Julie Madere, a spokeswoman for East Baton Rouge Parish public schools.

Most East Baton Rouge teachers already require students to address them as "ma'am" and "sir," Madere added.

Cliff Friedman, superintendent in Jefferson Davis Parish, suggested letting principals at each school handle any violations.

"I don't really see a situation where punishment is going to be a major problem," Friedman said. "Good teachers know how to handle those types of situations without a major distraction."

Sue Hall, who has taught in New Orleans schools for 28 years, said most students do not address her as ma'am, but that doesn't mean they lack respect.

"It's a nice (law) in theory, but not in reality," said Hall, who teaches fifth grade at Gently Terrace. "As long as children are respectful of me, and I am respectful of them, we have no problems."

Welfare reform leaving poorest families poorer

BY LAURA MECKLER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Welfare reform has driven the poorest families deeper into poverty, while slightly raising the incomes of those who are a little better off, say researchers who hope to broaden the debate over what constitutes success.

The biggest problem, opposing camps agree, is that many families leaving welfare aren't getting food stamps although they remain eligible. In 1995, 88 percent of poor kids received food stamps. By last year, it had fallen to 70 percent.

"The conventional wisdom here in Washington is that welfare reform is an unqualified success because caseload reductions have been so dramatic," said Wendell Primus, a researcher at the liberal-leaning Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, which released the report Sunday. Welfare caseloads have been cut nearly in half since peaking in 1994.

"We are not saying in this report that welfare reform is terrible. We're saying we have to bring more balance to what welfare reform is all about," added Primus, who resigned a top post with the Department of Health and Human Services to protest President Clinton's signing of the welfare bill three years ago Sun-

day. Enthusiasts of the reforms argue that, overall, most families are better off.

"More Americans are enjoying the freedom of independence from the chains of welfare," said a statement from Rep. Bill Archer, R-Texas, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, which oversaw the reforms.

Still, even reform backers acknowledge problems. A report from the Ways and Means Committee and testimony from the Clinton administration earlier this year acknowledged that the poor are losing ground, and Sunday's study is the most extensive documentation of these suspicions.

"There are people at the bottom who are worse off. We need to do something about that," said Ron Haskins, staff director for the committee's welfare panel, who helped write the welfare law. But he argued that more people are better off.

The report, which used Census and caseload data, examined families headed by single women and found their economic situations generally improved between 1993 and 1995.

But over the next two years, the poorest 20 percent of these families lost an average of \$577 per year, with incomes falling to \$8,047 annually. Typically, these are

families that left welfare but had not made up lost benefits with wages.

The situation was particularly bad for the poorest 10 percent, who lost an average of \$814 per year.

The problem, both sides explained, is people who are forced off the rolls but haven't figured out how to support themselves.

"In the old days, nobody cared about them. They just stayed on welfare forever," Haskins said. "Now, even to stay on welfare you need a certain level of competence. There are things you must do. If not, they cut your benefits."

The report also examined families in the next income tier — those making between 75 and 112 percent of the poverty line. They came out ahead, but only by an average of \$110 per year, bringing their average income up to \$15,857 per year.

Essentially, these families were able to replace welfare with work and come out ahead, if only slightly, but would have fared better had they kept the food stamps they were entitled to. They lost an average of \$530 in

"More Americans are enjoying the freedom of independence from the chains of welfare."

Bill Archer
Texas Representative

stamps between 1995 and 1997.

Primus suggested that, given the strong economy, they would be doing even better. Haskins said the law was designed so people would replace welfare with work: "The system is working exactly the way you drew it up on the chalkboard," he said.

President Clinton also expressed concern about declining food stamp rolls. Speaking at a welfare-to-work conference in Chicago this month, he called it "the only piece of troubling news in this whole happy scenario."

He said the administration has been unable to figure out why the rolls are falling, though some suspect families do not know they remain eligible for food help when they leave welfare. "We have to work on that," Clinton said.

Bomb threat clears Jehovah's Witness conference

MOSCOW (AP) — About 15,000 Jehovah's Witnesses were evacuated Saturday from Moscow's Olympic Stadium because of a bomb threat against their conference, church officials said.

The congress of church followers from Moscow and surrounding regions cleared out calmly in four minutes after the anonymous call, Jehovah's Witness spokesman Alexei Nazarichin said. Police were searching the stadium for explosives.

Earlier this week, the Jehovah's Witnesses almost canceled the congress when stadium officials said they were under pressure from the Moscow city government to bar the meeting. After last-minute negotiations, the stadium agreed to host the congress.

City officials have denied trying to block the congress.

The Moscow city prosecutor's office has been trying to outlaw the U.S.-based church, using a provision in Russia's controversial religion law that gives courts the right to ban religious groups found guilty of inciting hatred or intolerant behavior.

The restrictive religion law has drawn criticism from human rights groups and foreign religious organizations active in Russia.

Republicans oppose homosexual adoption

WASHINGTON (AP) — Several Republican presidential candidates have pledged to oppose allowing gay or lesbian couples to adopt and to promote the rights of organizations such as the Boy Scouts to exclude homosexuals, a gay rights group said Friday.

Human Rights Campaign said former Vice President Dan Quayle, radio host Alan Keyes, publisher Steve Forbes, conservative activist Gary Bauer, Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah and commentator Pat Buchanan signed the pledge before last week's Iowa straw poll.

Officials at the Forbes and Hatch campaigns confirmed their candidates had signed. Bauer's campaign could not be reached, and officials at the Buchanan, Keyes and Quayle organizations said they hadn't heard about it, indicating those candidates hadn't signed it.

Sen. John McCain of Arizona, former American Red Cross head Elizabeth Dole and the GOP front-runner, Gov. George W. Bush of Texas, did not sign. Human Rights Campaign said in a statement. Neither did Democratic candidates vice-president Al Gore, or Bill Bradley, the former U.S. senator from New Jersey.

The pledge was sponsored by more than a dozen groups that publicly abhor homosexuality. It has provisions opposing including same-sex relationships under the term "marriage," opposing discussion of homosexuality in schools, and federal laws to specifically protect homosexuals from discrimination.

Online company halts sale of Mein Kampf

BERLIN (AP) — German media giant Bertelsmann has stopped selling Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in its online bookstore, a spokesman said Saturday.

BOL International's German and Dutch services never offered the book because it is banned in those countries, but its British and French services did, company spokesman Christof Ehrhart said.

He said those sales were ended this week to block Germans or Dutch from buying the book, which Hitler wrote in prison a few years before leading the Nazis to power in 1933.

Under German law, books espousing Nazi philosophy are banned from public display or sale, punishable by up to five years in prison.

BOL's move came after German authorities said they were investigating complaints that Germans could circumvent laws against the sale of books such as "Mein Kampf" by ordering them from online booksellers in the United States.

Bertelsmann has asked its U.S.-based Internet bookselling partner barnesandnoble.com not to ship banned Nazi titles to customers in Germany.

Rodman arrested

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. (AP) — Flamboyant basketball star Dennis Rodman was arrested for allegedly being drunk in public and causing a disturbance at a restaurant, police said yesterday.

The former NBA all-star, known for his brightly dyed hair and numerous body piercings, spent a few hours in the city jail before being released without bail early Sunday, police Sgt. Jim Kaminsky said.

The owner of Woody's Wharf restaurant-bar called police Saturday night and "alleged that Mr. Rodman was intoxicated and causing a disturbance," Kaminsky said.

The sergeant said he had no other details on the disturbance.

Rodman played for the Detroit Pistons, San Antonio Spurs and Chicago Bulls before joining the Los Angeles Lakers for a brief stint last season. The Lakers waived him in April.