

Israeli scientists develop date-rape drug detector

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A bartender mixes a drink. The days of having to cart your cocktail to the ladies room may be over: two Israeli scientists say they have developed a sensor that can accurately detect date-rape drugs in drinks 100 percent of the time.

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Professor Fernando Patolsky and Doctor Michael Ioffe of Tel Aviv

University's school of chemistry say the sensor can tell you in real time whether your martini or your mocktail has been spiked with either of the two most common date-rape drugs.

"You just dip it into your drink, it might actually look like a stirrer in the final production, it's tiny, very tiny," Ioffe told AFP.

"And you don't even have to hold it up to the light and the system will let you know whether there are drugs dissolved in your drink."

The device sucks up a tiny drop of the suspect beverage and puts it in contact with the patented chemical formula devised by Patolsky and Ioffe.

"The drug itself is reacting with this chemical formulation and the previously clear formula becomes dirty and when the light shines it you can detect it," Ioffe said. "You don't have to do anything but dip it in your drink."

The two scientists tested their device on a range of popular cocktails as well as soft drinks and other beverages and found it was able to correctly tell which had been spiked 100 percent of the time.

"What's amazing is that there is no false positives until now," Ioffe said.

At present, the device can accurately detect the presence of the two of the most-commonly used date-rape drugs: GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyric acid) and ketamine.

The scientists are also working to expand the device's detection capacity to include Rohypnol, another drug commonly used to sedate the victims of date rape.

"We have some very, very optimistic preliminary results," Ioffe said.
"All we need is money."

The pair expect the first batch of sensors could be commercially available within a year and a half.

The chemical formula that the device uses is cheap to produce and is not poisonous, meaning companies should be able to produce the sensor without requiring government approval.

All that remains is for the producers to decide how the device will let its users know whether their drink is safe for consumption, and a range of options are being considered, Ioffe said.

"We haven't decided how it will let you know. Maybe it will just light up or a part of it will rotate or maybe it will send a signal to your cell phone because you want to be discreet about it."

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