

Gala farewell in Dallas for drug Ecstasy

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DALLAS—While drug counselors and agents stand by angry and helpless, fanciers of the "designer drug" Ecstasy are planning a gala sendoff for its last days of legal use this weekend.

Sales of the drug are booming in Dallas night spots where it is sold openly and, until midnight Sunday, legally. Ecstasy parties are being planned around town, and some people are stockpiling supplies as if it were the last days before Prohibition.

The new federal ban will make possession of the amphetamine a

felony with penalties up to 15 years in jail and a \$125,000 fine.

Medical experts have issued strong warnings about the drug's potential hazards, saying preliminary research indicates it may cause brain damage.

But the drug's final legal appearance has become a social event.

At the Texas Ranch, a bar where the management openly sells Ecstasy for \$20 a tablet, sales have climbed sharply, employees said.

"They're coming from all over" to buy it, said a manager of the shop who asked that he not be named. "Older people, younger

people, black, white—a real variety." Many are buying large quantities, he said.

The owner of the Texas Ranch, Joe Moren, said the club has been selling about 300 tablets a week and that customers can pay with major credit cards, if they prefer.

Many bars are buzzing with talk of private Ecstasy parties.

"The crowd I run with is going to have a couple hundred people celebrating it [the deadline] Friday," said a young man in Popsicle Toes, a club near Greenville Avenue.

Frustrated drug counselors say they don't think many users realize Ecstasy may be as dangerous as other controlled drugs.