

Huge crowds of people across the UK took to the streets on Wednesday night, boycotting nightclubs in protests against a sharp rise in spiking cases.

There were demonstrations in more than 40 university towns and cities, from St Andrews in Scotland to [Brighton](#) on the south coast of England, united by a common fury.

Opening the [Manchester](#) demonstration in front of at least 1,000 young people, Lucy Nichols, 21, declared “an emergency response to an emergency situation”. There is a “spiking epidemic” sweeping the UK, she said: “Every single women here will have a story about them or one of their friends being spiked. Now we can’t even do the age-old trick of covering up our drinks, because they are spiking us with needles now too.”

Everyone in the crowd outside the central library seemed to have their own story. Maisie Porter, 21, a geography student, said several members of her university netball team had been targeted. She said she had stopped buying drinks in clubs to stay safe.

Her friend, Megan Meager, 20, always makes sure she watches bartenders make her drinks. More people are buying shots now, she said: “You can neck them at the bar before anyone has chance to tamper with them.”

“The only injection I want is Pfizer!” said one of the many banners on show. “Pankhurst would be PISSED” read another, held up high after the march left St Peter’s Square, watched over by a statue of the Mancunian suffragette.

But it was the woman holding up the sign saying “I have never felt safe” who summed up why thousands of young people around the UK are demonstrating this week.

What began less than a fortnight ago as a [nightclub boycott](#) prompted by a spate of spiking cases, some allegedly involving needles, is becoming something bigger: a call to arms from a generation of young women fed up with being afraid.



Maisie Porter, left, and a fellow protester, Catherine Clayton. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

The nationwide protests were originally billed as Girls' Night In but organisers changed the name to become more inclusive. One of the Manchester organisers, George Virgo, is a trans man, who said he had experienced gender-based violence when perceived as a woman.

Figures released on Wednesday reveal 56 incidents of spiking by injection were recorded by police in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in September and October, in addition to 198 confirmed reports of drink spiking.

The revised data from the National [Police](#) Chiefs Council was issued amid anger about the prevalence of drink spiking, and widely shared social media testimony from individuals who believe they have been deliberately injected with spiking drugs.



Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester, led his support to the protest. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

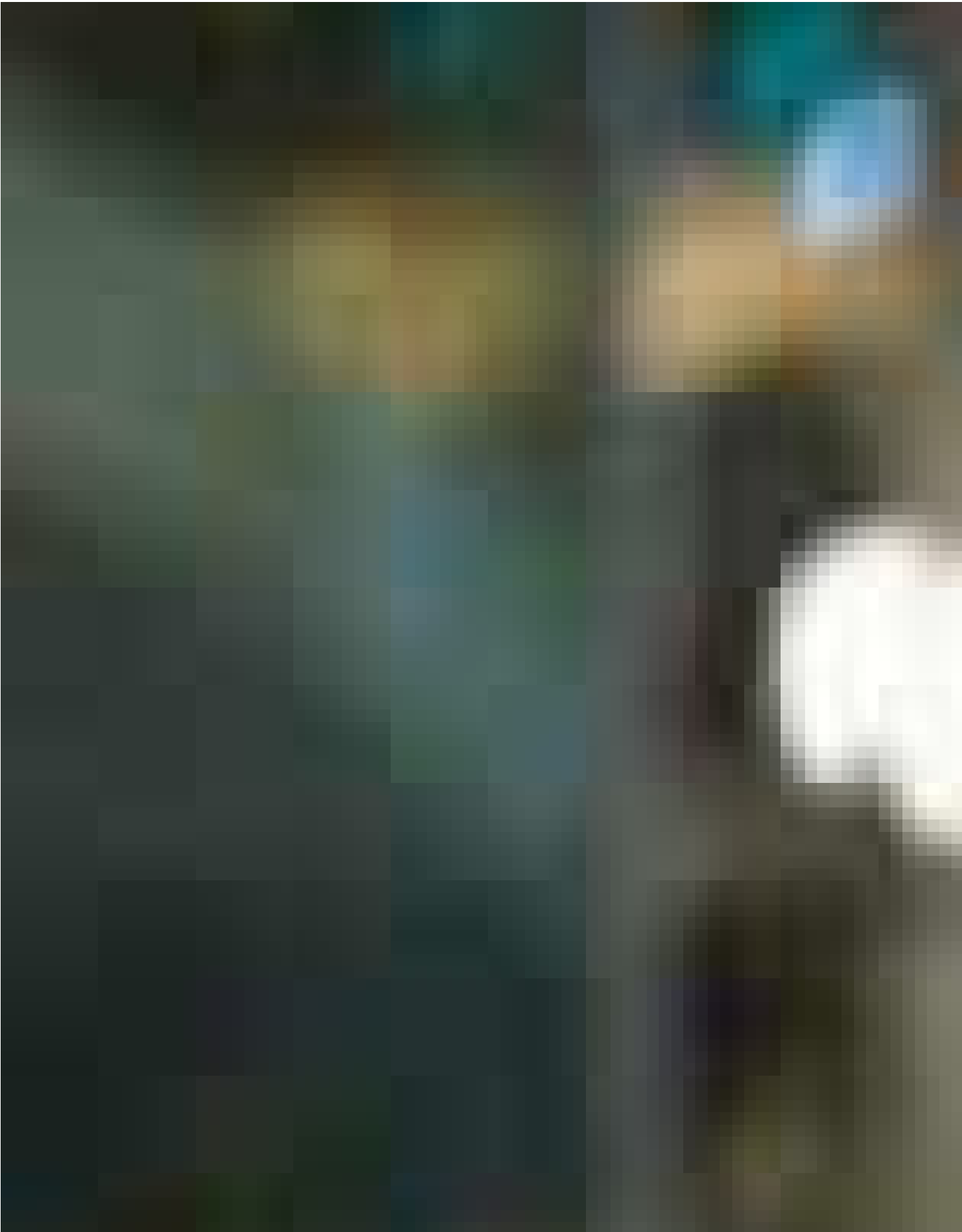
Not included in those figures was the man from Tameside in Greater Manchester who appeared in court on Wednesday charged with rape, after a complaint by a woman who said her drink had been spiked.

Greater Manchester police said the force had received a report on 27 September from a woman who said that during a night out in Stalybridge days earlier her drink had been spiked and she had been raped. Dale Garlick, 29, has been remanded in custody and will appear at Minshull crown court on 1 December.

Meanwhile, detectives are investigating six reports of women being injected while on nights out in Brighton during the past week.

Ch Supt Justin Burtenshaw of Brighton police said the reports were being taken “incredibly seriously” and called for victims of spiking to let police or bar staff know.

Several nightclubs in Manchester and across the UK closed on Wednesday night in solidarity with the protesters. Some have already implemented anti-spiking measures demanded by the protesters, such as cup covers and straws, and trained members of staff in safeguarding.



Demonstrators marching through Manchester. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

The organisers wrote an open letter to Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, demanding funding for “anti-spiking devices” and for the implementation of a women’s safety toolkit for venues, which would include measures such as easily accessible reporting mechanisms and working CCTV.

Burnham attended the Manchester protest, along with one of his teenage daughters and Sacha Lord, owner of the Warehouse Project nightclub and the Greater Manchester night-time economy adviser.

“I’m here to listen,” he said, saying his views on safety had changed as his girls, now 16 and 19, had started going out. It is not for women and girls to moderate their behaviour, he said: “This one is on us – on boys, on lads, on men.”

Further protests and boycotts are planned in the next 10 days, including in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff and London.

Source: [Demonstrators take to streets across UK to protest against ‘spiking epidemic’](#)