

WHAT IS METHAMPHETAMINE?

Methamphetamine is a powerful, highly addictive stimulant drug that dramatically affects the central nervous system. It is usually illegally produced and distributed.

Meth comes in several forms, including powder, crystal, rocks, and tablets. When it comes in the crystal form it is called "crystal meth."



HOW IS METH MADE?

Unlike drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, which are derived from plants, meth can be manufactured using a variety of store bought chemicals.

The most common ingredient in meth is pseudoephedrine or ephedrine, commonly found in cold medicine. Through a cooking process the pseudoephedrine or ephedrine is chemically changed into meth. The ingredients that are used in the process of making meth can include: ether, paint thinner, Freon®, acetone, anhydrous ammonia, iodine crystals, red phosphorus, drain cleaner, battery acid, and lithium (taken from inside batteries).

Superlabs produce large quantities of meth and supply organized drug trafficking groups that sell the drug in communities across the U.S. Most of the larger labs are controlled by Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations operating in the U.S. and Mexico.

Small Toxic Labs produce smaller quantities of meth. These labs can be set up in homes, motel rooms, inside automobiles, and in parks or rural areas -- really almost anywhere. (Since



the passage state and federal laws restricting the retail availability of certain precursors, the prevalence of these types of labs has waned, giving way to increased smuggling of high-quality meth from foreign superlabs).

HOW DOES METH AFFECT A USER?

Using meth causes an increase in energy and alertness, a decrease in appetite, and an intense euphoric "rush." That's in the short term.

With sustained use, a meth user can develop a tolerance to it. The user may take increasingly higher doses of meth trying to catch that high she first experienced. She may take it more frequently or may go on binges. She may change the way she takes meth. For example a user may have started by taking a pill, but as she develops a tolerance she may begin injecting it. Addiction is likely.

In the long term, a person using meth may experience irritability, fatigue, headaches, anxiety, sleeplessness, confusion, aggressive feelings, violent rages, cravings for more meth, and depression. They may become psychotic and experience paranoia, auditory hallucinations, mood disturbances, and delusions. The paranoia may lead to homicidal or suicidal thoughts.

A fairly common hallucination experienced by meth users is the so-called crank bug. The user gets the sensation that there are insects creeping on top of, or underneath, her skin. The user will pick at or scratch her skin trying to get rid of the imaginary bugs. This scratching can create open sores that may become infected.



Photos courtesy of Sheriff's Department, Multnomah County, Oregon

Meth reduces the amount of protective saliva around the teeth. Meth users also consume excess sugared, carbonated soft drinks, tend to neglect personal hygiene, grind their teeth and clench their jaws, leading to what is commonly called “meth mouth.” Teeth can eventually fall out of users’ mouths—even as they do simple things like eating a sandwich.

HOW DOES METH AFFECT EVERYONE ELSE?

As you can imagine, all those toxic chemicals used in the meth manufacturing process take a toll on the environment. Every pound of meth made can generate up to five pounds of toxic waste that may seep into the soil and groundwater.

The manufacturing process also generates toxic fumes. These fumes can severely harm anyone exposed to them. Meth labs also generate highly explosive gases.

Meth also has a very serious impact on children. Many children are rescued from homes with meth labs or meth using parents. Meth, chemicals, and syringes are all within reach of these children. Parents high on meth neglect their children. And the mental, physical, and emotional consequences for these Drug Endangered Children are often severe.

Millions of our tax dollars are spent each year to clean up meth labs, to care for Drug Endangered Children, and to pay for law enforcement to deal with the meth problem.



Sources: U.S. Department of Justice: <http://www.usdoj.gov/methawareness/>
And the Drug Enforcement Administration: <http://www.dea.gov/>