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Community Care Team News

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In This Issue

This issue examines Methamphetamine, the fastest growing drug in the U.S. Known as Speed, Meth, Crystal, Crank, Ice, Glass, Uppers, and Fire; it is used by teens, young adults, and even "soccer moms" who need extra energy. We will examine current use, how it affects the brain and body, and why rural areas in the Midwest are at risk.

The Problem

In the U.S. over 12 million have tried meth, with 1.5 million regular users. 58% of law enforcement agencies nationwide cite meth as their biggest problem. Illinois ranks 5th in the nation in meth lab seizures and has experienced a 730% increase in seizures since the year 2000. 30% of discovered labs house children.

The High

Meth can be smoked, snorted, injected or swallowed. Immediately after smoking or injecting Meth, the user experiences a sensation of extreme pleasure called a "rush" that can last as long as 20 minutes. The rush is followed by changes in thought where the user feels powerful, clever, smart and funny. These feelings can last between 18 and 24 hours. The abuser maintains the high by injecting or smoking more meth trying to recapture the initial rush. Each time the abuser smokes or injects more of the drug a smaller euphoric rush occurs until finally there is no rush and no high. This

may go for a few days to a couple of weeks. If meth is swallowed or snorted, the user does not experience the rush, but does experience the increased energy and upbeat feeling.

The Low

"Tweaking" occurs at the end of the high when nothing the users do will take away their feelings of discomfort. Meth triggers a number of unpleasant effects. Prolonged use is associated with violent and anti-social behavior. Meth users may have psychological symptoms such as delusions of insects under their skin. In an effort to remove the imagined insects, the users scratch their skin obsessively. Often the users' thoughts become quite paranoid. Some users are unable to pay attention to any one thing while others become obsessed with a single thought, like taking apart a clock for 10 hours at a stretch. This tweaking period concludes when the users cannot stay up any longer and they crash, entering a deep sleep for 1 to 3 days.

Side Effects

Short and long term effects of Methamphetamine use include:

- Impaired speech
- Hallucinations
- Acne or sores
- Lethargy
- Violence
- Paranoid schizophrenic behavior
- Psychotic behavior

- Nervousness
- Aggression
- Increased heart rate, blood pressure and risk of stroke
- Memory loss
- Loss of appetite
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Brain damage similar to stroke, epilepsy or Alzheimer's disease
- Rapid physical aging

Signs of Use

It may not be easy to tell if someone is using meth. But there are signs to look for, including:

- Inability to sleep
- Increased sensitivity to noise
- Nervous activity like scratching
- Irritability, dizziness or confusion
- Extreme anorexia
- Tremors or even convulsions
- Presence of inhaling paraphernalia, such as razor blades, mirrors and straws
- Presence of injecting paraphernalia, such as syringes, heated spoons or surgical tubing.

Meth Labs

The prevalence of clandestine meth manufacturing labs is rapidly increasing in the Midwest. Meth can be "cooked" or produced in home labs, cars, even backpacks. The ingredients for making meth are readily and legally available, and include anhydrous ammonia or propane and pseudoephedrine (Sudafed). The manufacturing process releases hazardous vapors and residue that settle inside the structure, continuing to contaminate the premises until it is thoroughly decontaminated by trained professionals. For every pound of meth created, 5-6 lbs of toxic waste is

produced. Anyone entering a meth lab may be exposed to contaminants through respiratory or skin contact with short or long term health effects.

Meth lab indicators include:

- unusual pungent odors
- pseudoephedrine packets
- bulk amounts of chemicals
- corrosion
- darkly covered windows
- excessive amounts of waste
- jugs, bottles, and buckets
- tubes and piping
- rolls of duct tape
- propane and anhydrous ammonia tanks, gas cans
- strainers, coffee filters and cheesecloth

Short-term exposure to meth residue and vapors may include these symptoms:

- cough/shortness of breath
- chest pain or tightness
- headache
- skin or eye irritation
- chemical burns
- nausea
- lethargy

Other dangers related to approaching a lab include aggressive behavior associated with meth use and "booby traps" in yards or on steps to discourage intruders.

More information about methamphetamine can be found at www.methresources.gov, www.meth-addiction.com and www.dea.gov. For local assistance contact **Breaking Free** (897-1003), the **Renz Center** (513-6886), **Community Counseling of the Fox Valley** (966-7400) or **Ben Gordon Mental Health Center** (815/756-4875).