

Methamphetamine
What to watch for...
Why the stakes are so high.

Law enforcement authorities, even in our small rural community, are seeing an alarming rise in the abuse of methamphetamine, quickly overtaking marijuana as the “popular drug” but this trend if unchecked can be devastating to our community.

One of the disturbing facets of our society is the prevalence of illegal drugs. One of the most insidious of these drugs is methamphetamine, and methamphetamine use is on the rise nationwide.

Methamphetamine (meth) is a powerful central nervous system stimulant, in a crystal-like powder form, that makes users experience a sudden “rush” or “high” that lasts a few minutes after ingestion, either by snorting, eating, injecting, or smoking the drug. After this initial rush, users experience a state of agitation that can lead to violent and erratic behavior, and other possible immediate effects include increased wakefulness and insomnia, decreased appetite, irritability/aggression, anxiety, nervousness, convulsions and heart attack.

The long-term consequences of meth use include addiction, with a quickly developing tolerance. Meth users also sometimes forgo self-care and use the drug in a “binge” that last a few days. Chronic use can cause paranoia, hallucinations, repetitive behavior (such as compulsively cleaning, grooming or disassembling and assembling objects), and delusions of parasites or insects crawling under the skin. Users can obsessively scratch their skin to get rid of these imagined insects. Long-term use, high dosages, or both can bring on full-blown toxic psychosis (often exhibited as violent, aggressive behavior). This violent, aggressive behavior is usually coupled with extreme paranoia. Meth can also cause strokes and death.

In addition to these negative consequences of meth on individual users, meth has dire consequences for the community as a whole. For example, when meth is manufactured, in clandestine laboratories, each pound of the drug manufactured results in five to six pounds of hazardous waste that poses immediate and long term environmental and health risks. The “cooking” process used to make meth also produces toxic vapors which can render a building uninhabitable. Clean up of meth labs requires special training and can cost an average of \$2,000 to \$4,000. Clean up of meth labs also poses a great risk for landlords and property owners who may be held liable if tenants have been operating a meth lab on his or her property.

Methamphetamine has devastating consequences for children too. Hundreds of children are neglected every year after living with parents who are meth "cooks." Children who reside in or near meth labs are at a great risk of being harmed in such a toxic environment, due to the noxious fumes which can cause brain damage and the explosive elements that go into making the drug. Cooking meth is extremely dangerous, and labs often catch on fire and explode. A child living inside could overdose from meth left out

by parents, suffer from attachment disorders or behavioral problems, be malnourished, physically or sexually abused and/or burned or fatally injured from a fire or explosion. The number of foster care children has been rising rapidly in states that have been hit by the meth scourge. Children are taken from their parents who may have been using or making methamphetamine, and placed in foster homes, crowding an already overflowing system with limited resources. According to an article in The New York Times, it has also become difficult to attract foster parents for these children because they often have many behavior problems. For example, they can't sleep at night since they are used to sleeping on a floor and they often have not been toilet trained due to the neglectful nature of their upbringing. This overwhelming influx of cases has been suffocating social workers, leaving them desperate for help.

Meth can also lead to users putting themselves at risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases as users sometimes feel hypersexual and uninhibited which can lead to risky behavior and unprotected sexual contact. Some meth users also shoot the drug intravenously and sharing of "dirty" needles can lead to the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

Meth manufacture can also lead to explosions and fire, and the treatment of the resulting severe burns and other medical problems can tax a hospital and local health care system in the extreme. Also, most of the costs for treating these injuries are never recovered.

Meth labs along with the selling of the drug can breed crime, including burglaries, thefts, and even murder. Both teenagers and adults addicted to the drug and who have no income to pay for their habit, may steal valuables from their own homes or even their friends' homes. High on meth, there's no telling what a person would do if provoked - people have been killed for not owing up to a drug payment or coming through on a transaction. This type of crime requires a great deal of attention from the police, for which a town may not have the funding or the resources to spare. Also, with an ever-increasing amount of meth coming from the Mexican Drug Cartels, problems stemming from the interdiction of the drug and the organized crime practiced by the Cartels is ever increasing.