

Facts About Meth

Meth Fact Sheet

What is it?

Methamphetamine – also known as meth, crank, crystal, and speed — is a powerfully addictive central nervous system stimulant.

What does it look like?

Meth is a white, odorless, bitter-tasting powder that easily dissolves in alcohol or water and can be smoked, injected or snorted.

Where is it made?

Two-thirds of our country's meth supply is produced in super labs in Mexico and Southern California run by organized crime and street gangs. The remaining third is made in the U.S. in makeshift meth labs found in basements, kitchens, garages, bedrooms, barns, vacant buildings, campgrounds, hotels and motels and trunks of cars.

How is it made?

Meth is made from a fairly simple recipe found on the internet and can be produced in as few as 6 to 8 hours using apparatus and cookware that can be quickly dismantled and stored or relocated to avoid detection. Some of the ingredients commonly used to make meth are over-the-counter cold medications containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, red phosphorous, hydrochloric acid, anhydrous ammonia, drain cleaner, battery acid, lye, lantern fuel, and antifreeze. The fumes, vapors, and spillage associated with cooking meth can be toxic and explosive – and hazardous to children, adults and the environment.

What are the short-term effects of taking meth?

Immediately after smoking or injection, the user experiences an intense sensation, called a "rush" or "flash," that lasts only a few minutes and is described as extremely pleasurable. (Snorting or swallowing meth produces euphoria — a high, but not a rush.) Following the "rush," there is typically a state of high agitation that in some individuals can lead to violent behavior. Other possible immediate effects include increased wakefulness and insomnia, decreased appetite, irritability/aggression, anxiety, nervousness, convulsions and heart attack.

What are the long-term effects of taking meth?

Meth is addictive, and users can develop a tolerance quickly, needing larger amounts to get high. In some cases, users forego food and sleep and take more meth every few hours for days, "binging" until they run out of the drug or become too disorganized to continue using. 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. This violent, aggressive behavior is usually coupled with extreme paranoia. Meth can also cause strokes and death.

Learn what you can do in the **METH: WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?** fact sheet

Signs of Meth Use

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If you think someone you know might be using meth, or you're a parent who suspects your teen might be using, here is a list of warning signs to look for.

Physical Symptoms:

- Weight loss
- Abnormal sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Nasal problems or nosebleeds
- Sores that do not heal
- Dilated pupils
- Burns on lips or fingers
- Track marks on arms
- Aggression or violent behavior
- False sense of confidence and power
- Convulsions
- Carelessness about appearance
- Deceit or secretiveness

Behavioral Symptoms:

- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Change in friends
- Disinterest in previously enjoyed activities
- Increased activity
- Long periods of sleeplessness (24-120 hours)
- Long periods of sleep (24-48 hours)
- Incessant talking
- Irritability
- Twitching and shaking
- Itching
- Decreased appetite
- Erratic attention span
- Repetitious behavior, such as picking at skin, pulling out hair, compulsively cleaning, grooming or disassembling and assembling objects

Mental Symptoms:

- Paranoia
- Anxiousness
- Nervousness
- Agitation
- Extreme moodiness
- Severe depression
- Hallucinations
- Delusions of parasites or insects crawling under the skin.

Paraphernalia:

- Rolled up paper money or short straws
- Pieces of glass/mirrors
- Razor blades
- Burned spoons
- Surgical tubing
- Syringes/needles

In all cases of meth use, a user may experience a loss of inhibitions and a false sense of control and confidence, which can lead to dangerous behavior.

For facts about meth use, please refer to the **FACTS ABOUT METH** fact sheet

Meth can cause harm not only to those who are addicted to the drug, but their family, friends and neighbors too. Here are a few ways meth can cause harm .

Environmental Harm

A meth lab can operate unnoticed in any neighborhood for years, causing serious health hazards to everyone around. For each pound of meth produced, five to six pounds of hazardous waste are generated, posing immediate and long-term environmental health risks. The chemicals used to make meth are toxic, and “meth cooks” routinely dump waste into streams, rivers, fields, backyards and sewage systems, which can in turn contaminate water resources for humans and animals. Chlorinated solvents and other toxic by-products used to make meth pose long-term hazards because they can persist in soil and groundwater for years.

Also, the poisonous vapors produced during cooking permeate the halls and carpets of houses and buildings, often making them uninhabitable. Cleaning up these sites requires specialized training and costs an average of \$2,000-\$4,000 per site.

If you have questions about environmental contamination from an illegal lab, contact your state’s department of ecology office.

Puts Children at Risk

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 from the explosive nature of the ingredients and by products as well as from the noxious fumes which can cause brain damage. 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.

Orphaned Children

The number of foster care children has been rising rapidly in states that have been hit hardest by meth. Children whose parents have been using or making meth, are placed in foster homes, crowding an already overflowing system with limited resources. These children often have behavioral problems due to the neglectful conditions in which they've been living. The influx of cases has been overwhelming social workers, leaving them desperate for help.

HIV/AIDS

While high on meth, users can feel hypersexual and uninhibited, often forgetting to use protection. Also, since meth can be administered intravenously some users opt for dirty needles. These acts of carelessness can lead to the transmission of serious and deadly diseases, such as hepatitis, HIV and AIDS.

Hospitals and Burn Units

Meth production is a dangerous and illegal business that takes place in living spaces — from kitchens to basements to hotel rooms. The materials that are used to produce the drug are toxic and often flammable and any mistakes can result in an explosion or injury to not just the meth cook, but their families as well. These chemical burns are tough to treat and extremely expensive. Much of the care in these specialized units goes uncompensated, which puts a great financial strain on the hospitals and state medical programs.

Crime

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.

For facts about meth use, please refer to the **FACTS ABOUT METH** fact sheet

What Are the Signs of a Meth Lab?

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What are signs of a meth lab?

A typical meth lab is a collection of chemical bottles, hoses, and pressurized cylinders. The cylinders can take many forms, from modified propane tanks to fire extinguishers, scuba tanks and soda dispensers. The tanks contain anhydrous ammonia or hydrochloric acid — both highly poisonous and corrosive.

Labs are frequently abandoned, and the potentially explosive and very toxic chemicals are left behind. Chemicals may also be burned or dumped in woods or along roads.

What does a meth lab smell like? Strong chemical odors such as ether, ammonia (smells like cat urine) and acetone (smells like nail polish)

The most common chemicals used to start the meth-making process are over-the-counter cold and asthma medications which contain ephedrine or pseudoephedrine as decongestants or stimulants.

Here are signs of a meth lab:

- Unusual strong chemical odors such as ether, ammonia (smell similar to cat urine) and acetone (smells similar to fingernail polish)
- Excess amounts of cold medicines containing Ephedrine or pseudoephedrine
- Empty pill bottles or blister packs
- Propane/Freon tanks with blue corrosion on fittings or spray-painted or burned, with bent or tampered valves
- Starting fluid cans opened from the bottom
- Heating sources such as hotplates/torches
- Excess coffee filters
- Excess baggies
- Excess matches
- Excess lithium batteries
- Cookware (Corning type) with white residue

- Glassware, mason jars or other glass containers
- Plastic tubing
- Funnels
- Hoses leading outside for ventilation
- Soft drink bottles with hoses running from them
- Drain cleaner, paint thinner, toluene, denatured alcohol, ammonia, acid, starter fluid, antifreeze, hydrogen peroxide, rock salt/iodine
- Lantern or camp stove fuel
- Iodine- or chemical-stained bathrooms or kitchen fixtures
- Evidence of chemical waste or dumping
- Excessive amounts of trash, particularly chemical containers, coffee filters with red stains, duct tape rolls. Empty cans of or paint thinner or pieces of red-stained cloth around the property
- Secretive or unfriendly occupants
- Extensive security measures or attempts to ensure privacy such as “No Trespassing” or “Beware of Dog” signs, fences, and large trees or shrubs
- Curtains always drawn or windows blackened or covered with aluminum foil on residences, garages, sheds, or other structures
- Increased activity, especially at night
- Frequent visitors, particularly at unusual times
- Renters who pay their landlords in cash

*** If you suspect a dwelling or property may be an illegal lab, contact your local police, or sheriff's department. If it's an emergency, call 911. Do not enter a site that you think may have been used for cooking meth. Meth labs present extreme dangers from explosions and exposure to hazardous chemicals.

Find out possible health problems of living near an illegal lab. Read the **WHAT ARE THE RISKS IF I LIVE NEAR A METH LAB?** fact sheet

What Are the Risks If I Live Near a Meth Lab?

Meth Fact Sheet

Meth causes health problems not just for the users, but also for others who are exposed to the chemicals by living in or near a former meth lab.

The risk of injury from chemical exposure depends on the chemical itself, the concentration, the quantity, and the length and route of exposure. Chemicals may enter the body by being breathed, eaten, injected (by a contaminated needle or accidental skin prick), or absorbed by the skin.

Acute Exposure: An acute chemical exposure is one that occurs over a relatively short period of time and may result in health effects. An acute exposure to high levels of contaminants found in meth labs cause shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, chemical irritation, lesions and burns to the skin, eyes, mouth and nose, and in severe cases, death. Acute reactions of this nature could occur during or immediately after a drug bust, before the lab has been ventilated.

Less severe symptoms resulting from a less acute exposure cause headache, nausea, dizziness, and fatigue or lethargy. These symptoms have been known to occur in people who have entered a drug lab after the bust has been completed, but before the property has been adequately cleaned and ventilated. These symptoms usually go away after several hours.

Corrosive Effects: Inhalation or skin exposure may result in injury from corrosive substances present in a meth lab. Symptoms range from shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, to burns to the skin.

Solvents: Exposure to solvents can irritate the skin, mucous membranes, respiratory tract, and cause central nervous system effects. They are also dangerous because of their fire and explosive properties.

Chronic Exposure: Chronic exposure occurs over an extended period of time, such as weeks, months, or years. A chronic health effect is one that usually appears after a lengthy period of time, possibly years. Not much is known about the chronic health effects from these labs. However, there is scientific evidence from animal and human toxicity studies that shows the chemicals used to manufacture meth can cause a range of health effects include cancer, damage to the brain, liver and kidneys, birth defects, and reproductive problems, such as miscarriages.

***** If you suspect a dwelling or property may be an illegal lab, contact your local police, or sheriff's department. If it's an emergency, call 911.** Do not enter a site that you think may have been used for cooking meth. Meth labs present extreme dangers from explosions and exposure to hazardous chemicals. Breathing the fumes and handling substances can cause injury and even death. Meth labs are considered hazardous waste sites and should only be entered by trained and equipped emergency-response professionals.

Want to know how to identify a meth lab? Read the **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A METH LAB?** fact sheet

Are you concerned about the meth problem? Here is a list of things you can do to help your community.

Educate Yourself

- Learn more about this insidious drug and how it affects both the user and the community at large. A good place to start is the Facts About Meth fact sheet.

Spread the Word

- Talk about dangers of meth with your friends, neighbors, coworkers and most importantly your children. For ways to talk to your kids about drugs, visit the Partnership for a Drug-Free America's parent resource at drugfree.org/parent.
- Put up anti-meth posters in as many stores in your area as possible as well as where you work.
- Write letters to your local newspaper and television stations to encourage them to cover any meth-related stories — or share your personal experience with them.
- Send emails with anti-meth links or articles to your friends to make them more aware of the dangers of the drug.
- Take advantage of when you encounter neighbors at the supermarket, a school play, the movies or even while filling up your gas tank and talk about the meth problem in your community.

Be Alert

- Look for signs of meth use, production and dealing throughout your neighborhood.
- Find out how to spot and report suspicious activity to the police.
- If you're moving into a new home, ask your real estate broker if they know of any meth labs that have been in the area.
- If you suspected a meth lab in your area contact your local police, or sheriff's department. **If it's an emergency, call 911.**

Take Action

- Speak out in schools, places of worship or any public community forum and educate others about the dangers of meth.
- Link to www.drugfree.org/meth from your website.
- Encourage family and friends struggling with meth use to get help.
- Join a local community educational, support or activist group.
- Volunteer to work with children who have lost their parents to meth or volunteer to help social workers who are working with children left behind from addicted parents.
- Report meth labs in your community to local law enforcement.
- Volunteer in a local treatment center, hospital or burn center, where unfortunately many meth cooks and their children wind up.
- Advocate for an in-school meth education program at PTA meetings and teacher conferences.
- Organize landlord forums to inform them of the risks and signs of meth labs in their buildings.
- Work with the local police to set up a Block Watch program in your neighborhood.

Reach Out!

Ending meth requires support and resources from across your community. The following are some of the groups in your area who can help stop meth:

- Community prevention coalitions
- Treatment organizations
- Law enforcement
- Courts
- Legal professionals
- Child welfare/development/protection services and agencies
- Fire protection and emergency services
- Local businesses and retailers
- Any media source
- Secondary schools and parent organizations
- Local colleges and universities
- Mental health agencies
- Faith communities
- Real estate and public housing agencies

Find out possible health problems of living near an illegal lab. Read the **WHAT ARE THE RISKS IF I LIVE NEAR A METH LAB?** fact sheet

Additional Resources

Meth Fact Sheet

National Methamphetamine Resources

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America

www.drugfree.org/meth

Comprehensive information, resources, video stories and tips from experts and parents.

MethResources.gov

www.methresources.gov/

The federal government's comprehensive directory of information and programs related to methamphetamine.

Just Think Twice

www.justthinktwice.com/

A youth oriented site created by the Drug Enforcement Agency's Demand Reduction Program.

Office of National Drug Control Policy – Methamphetamine Fact Sheet

www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov

(Search on "methamphetamine fact sheet")

Detailed description of methamphetamine and other resources.

The Drug Enforcement Administration – Methamphetamine Information

www.dea.gov/concern/amphetamines.html

The National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children

www.nationaldec.org/

Alliance for those concerned about children endangered by caregivers who manufacture, deal or use drugs.

KCI: The Anti-Meth Site

www.kci.org/

Extensive resources and links about methamphetamine.

State and Local Methamphetamine Resources

Partnership Local Programs

<http://www.drugfree.org>

(Choose "Local Offices" from the home page)

Local information about methamphetamine is available from the Partnership's local chapters, affiliates and alliances.

Methresources.gov – State-By-State

<http://www.methresources.gov/MethByState.aspx>

An online clearinghouse of methamphetamine information, which includes a directory of programs, fact sheets, and events, organized on a state-by-state basis.

Partners for Substance Abuse Prevention – Partner Directory Map

preventionpartners.samhsa.gov/partner_listing.asp

A directory of community based programs that work to prevent substance abuse.

National Association of Counties - Methamphetamine Action Clearinghouse

www.naco.org

(Search on "meth action clearinghouse")

NACo is committed to raising public awareness about and helping counties respond to the nation's methamphetamine drug problem.

Other Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

www.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator

<http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/>

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov> or 1-800-729-6686

SAMHSA's Center on Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)

www.csat.samhsa.gov or 1-800-662-HELP

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

www.drugabuse.gov

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

www.nimh.nih.gov