

Methamphetamine Abuse: An Indiana Epidemic?

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Methamphetamine is a powerfully addictive stimulant that dramatically affects the central nervous system. Commonly known as speed, meth, ice, crystal, crank, and glass, it is a white, odorless, bitter-tasting, crystalline powder that easily dissolves in water or alcohol.

Methamphetamine causes increased activity, decreased appetite and a general sense of well-being for 8-to-12 hours, but after the initial “rush,” there is typically a state of high agitation that in some cases can lead to violent behavior.

Short-term effects of methamphetamine use might include: euphoria, increased alertness, paranoia, decreased appetite and increased physical activity, athetosis (writhing, jerky, or flailing movements), irritability, extreme nervousness, insomnia, confusion, tremors, anxiety, aggression, incessant talking, hyperthermia, convulsions, and sometimes death.

Methamphetamine is a popular drug at raves (all night dance parties). Most 1994 methamphetamine-related deaths (92%) involved methamphetamine in combination with at least one other drug (alcohol—30%; heroin—23%; or cocaine—21%).

The most effective treatments for methamphetamine addiction are “cognitive behavioral interventions” or therapeutic approaches designed to help modify a person’s thinking, expectancies, and behaviors to increase skills in coping with various life stressors. Yet methamphetamine addiction is difficult to treat because addicts get over acute withdrawal effects quickly, while physical recovery can last from six months to two years. Because prolonged use causes changes in the brain, willpower alone will not cure methamphetamine addicts, and because there are psychiatric, social, and biological components to meth dependence, there’s a high likelihood of relapse.

Methamphetamine abuse is a substantial drug problem in Indiana. In 2002 and 2003, Indiana State Police officials reported nearly 2,250 methamphetamine labs seized across the state in such places as homes, barns, hotel/motel rooms, and even vehicles. Most methamphetamine labs seized in Indiana have been in rural farming areas south of I-70 and West of I-65, particularly along the corridor from Evansville to Bloomington. The drug is easily made in clandestine laboratories with relatively inexpensive over-the-counter ingredients. The most common

production method requires anhydrous ammonia, an agricultural fertilizer. Rural Indiana law officers report a steady increase in thefts of this chemical across the state.

Reckless individuals manufacturing meth cause explosions, fires, and environmental damage. Lab operators dump toxic waste down household drains, on rural roads, or in fields and rivers. The average cost of a methamphetamine lab cleanup is about \$5,000, but some cost as much as \$150,000, as improperly dumped chemicals remain in the soil and groundwater for years unless the contaminated soil is incinerated.

The struggle against meth addiction grows. A newly developed additive called “GloTell,” when added to anhydrous ammonia, stains the hands of anyone who touches the fertilizer. It leaves a neon-bright-pink mark on anyone who ingests the end product. Snort it and it turns the nose florescent pink; inject it and the telltale pink shows up at the injection site. It also turns any methamphetamine created with it an unbleachable pink color.

And Indiana legislation (Public Law 39/House Enrolled Act 1136, authored by Alan Chowning, D-Sullivan) created a “Methamphetamine Abuse Task Force,” to bring together representatives from law enforcement, education, family and social services, healthcare and other fields to develop a strategic action plan to lessen the demand for methamphetamine and decrease the drug supply. Due to decreasing numbers of lab seizures this year consideration was given to disbanding the Task Force, yet it withstood scrutiny. It seems clear that the Task Force, coupled with education and awareness about methamphetamine, its abuse, and its social and environmental consequences, are central to any community’s ability to respond quickly and appropriately to this frightening epidemic.

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