

What's Crystal Meth?

Why does it matter to me?

With the growing number of Meth labs in rural Wisconsin, more and more users are presenting to hospital emergency departments with complications associated with meth addiction. This article is meant to increase community awareness and to identify some of the common signs of meth addiction.

First, let's review amphetamines. Amphetamines are medications typically prescribed for Attention Deficit Disorder or ADD. These medications release chemicals, in low doses, to the brain. This causes stimulation to the brain but actually "slows" the patient down allowing them to be more alert. Methamphetamines are amphetamines that are much stronger. In low doses it can be used for various medical conditions. However, recreational or addicts use meth in high doses to create a "rush" or "high".

What is Crystal Meth? Crystal Meth is a street version of methamphetamines. Crystal meth can be made very easily. Typically it is produced in small labs in kitchens, bathrooms and garages. There have even been labs found in vehicles. Crystal meth typically is made by mixing pseudoephedrine, red phosphorus, iodine, ammonia, paint thinner and either Drano or the lithium from batteries. Now, who would want that in their body??? Street names from crystal meth include the following; meth, crank, crystal, speed, chalk, glass, ice, and zip....but the list goes on and on..

Crystal meth typically resembles small fragments of glass or shiny blue-white "rocks" of various sizes. It is smoked using glass pipes similar to pipes used to smoke crack cocaine. Crystal methamphetamine also may be injected. Meth can also come in powder form and can be snorted. Individuals who use crystal meth may have episodes of increased alertness, impaired speech, heightened sexual activity, loss of appetite, hallucinations, violent behavior, paranoia, anxiety, confusion, and insomnia.

There are few things your dealer won't tell you. Like, your teeth will turn yellow, gray or black and may even fall out and your body odor will be terrible. How about this....you'll pick imaginary bugs crawling under your skin causing open wounds.

Meth addiction affects people of all ages, races and genders. However, there is a greater use in rural communities, the "rave" or "club" scene, high school and college students trying to stay awake and with adolescents who are trying to lose weight. A typical high can last from 10-24 hours then the user will "crash." When meth users "crash," they have an extreme loss of energy and are very fatigued. This causes emotional and physiological changes to the human body and often causes drug craving. Addicted users avoid the "crash" by repeated use of meth. Withdrawal symptoms include severe drug craving, insomnia, restlessness, mental confusion and depression. People who abuse meth regularly are known as "tweakers."

Crystal meth use is associated with multiple serious medical problems. The drug can cause rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, and damage to the small blood vessels in the brain. Chronic use of the drug can result in inflammation of the heart lining and pulmonary edema. Overdoses can cause elevated body temperature, convulsions, coma, stroke, heart attack and DEATH. Many of these patients present to the emergency department requiring life saving interventions.

Experts say that crystal meth is one of the most addictive street drugs and one of the hardest to treat. Addiction counsellors say there is a relapse rate of 92% which is worse than cocaine. According to the 2003 National Survey on Drug use and Health, 12.3 million Americans age 12 and older had tried methamphetamine at least once in their lifetimes.

How can you make a difference? Stay informed. Parents, educators and peers should be aware of the signs and symptoms associated with illegal meth use. Know what resources there are available in our area for addicted drug users. Most importantly, if you know of meth labs in the area please contact law enforcement.