

# Methamphetamine: A Sweeping Epidemic

## Background:

- According to Wikipedia, methamphetamine is a "powerful synthetic central nervous system stimulant drug used for both medicinal and recreational purposes."  
(Wikipedia, 2006)
- For medicinal purposes, doctors can prescribe pure methamphetamine tablets under the brand name Desoxyn. Desoxyn is often used to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, narcolepsy, and obesity.
- The illegal use of methamphetamines on the street, however, is much more popular, and is what is causing our nation to experience an epidemic of meth users.
- When used for recreation, meth is found in either a powder or crystal form. As a powder, the street names for meth include "speed," "zip," "chalk," "go-fast," and "cristy." As crystals, meth can be called "crystal," "ice," "64 glass," and "quartz." (KCI The Anti-Meth Site, 2006)
- Methamphetamine can be smoked, snorted, injected intravenously, or eaten. When experiencing a methamphetamine high, one will have altering moods, usually beginning with euphoric "flashes" or "rushes," that can last from 8 to 24 hours. The euphoria that accompanies meth use is one of its most addicting qualities.
- Meth is so prevalent in low-income, rural areas of the United States because its materials are cheap and easy to find, and it is relatively simple to make. Over-the-counter cold medicines containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, red phosphorous, hydrochloric acid, drain cleaner, battery acid, lye, lantern fuel,

and antifreeze (KCI The Anti-Meth Site, 2006) are all one needs to make this potentially devastating drug.

- Meth is usually "cooked" in temporary labs that can be found in barns, garages, backrooms, motels, vacant buildings, and even vehicles. (KCI The Anti-Meth Site, 2006) The widely residential placement of these labs poses an extremely dangerous risk to innocent bystanders and even the makers themselves. Because of the highly explosive nature of the chemicals used, fatalities have occurred when meth recipes gone wrong have detonated.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

- Methamphetamine has been described by PBS as an "unnecessary epidemic." This statement rings true because of the possibility that the government could have, and still can, monitor the production of the ingredients used to make methamphetamine. Unlike many other drugs derived from plants that cannot be contained, the chemicals found in meth are manufactured in just nine factories worldwide, and can therefore be regulated. (PBS, 2006)
- The most devastating effect of methamphetamine is the detriment to family life. High on meth for sometimes days at a time, parents often neglect, abuse their children both sexually and physically, and expose them to toxic chemicals. (PBS, 2006) The existence of meth in a community also plays a big part in increasing area crimes rates.
- The short-term effects of methamphetamine include euphoria, paranoia, decreased appetite and increased physical activity, flailing, tremors, tooth grinding, acne, sores, auditory and visual hallucinations, and delusions of parasites or insects on the skin. Hyperthermia, convulsions, chest pain, and hypertension are short-term effects that may result in death. (KCI The Anti-Meth Site, 2006)
- Long-term effects of methamphetamine use include damage to the lungs, kidneys, liver, and brain,

malnutrition, violent behavior, chronic depression, and a mental disorder that closely resembles schizophrenia.

### **Epidemiologic Picture:**

- Over the past fifteen years, the number of methamphetamine users in the United States has skyrocketed to 15 million.
- First used in California by motorcycle gangs, meth has quickly and steadily expanded eastward, making its primary home in rural areas of the West.
- Although meth was first linked to white, male, blue collar-workers, its spread to the East Coast has fostered a wealth of users. (PBS, 2006)
- Today, more men than women, and more whites than any other race have used methamphetamine. High school and college students, white and blue collar-workers, and people of all ages now blend to create the devastatingly vast pool of meth users in our country.
- Due to an increased awareness of our nation's obvious methamphetamine epidemic, we can work towards providing more and more of the addicted with the support they need to get clean once and for all.

### **Solutions:**

- **Montana Meth Project** ([www.notevenonce.com](http://www.notevenonce.com))

Founded in February 2005, the Montana Meth Project is "the only prevention-focused organization in Montana using a research methodology approach to reduce the prevalence and frequency of meth use in the state." (Montana Meth Project, 2006) Although the Montana Meth Project's concentration is particularly on Montana, the ads released by the group are reaching young people all over the country. These ads, which are "not recommended for dinnertime viewing," do a wonderful job of grabbing the attention of their target audience, teens between the ages of 12 and 17. Both graphic and tragic, the ads depict a true picture of the horrors to which meth use can lead. The slogan "Meth: Not Even Once," serves as an immediate

warning sign of the incredibly addictive nature of this drug.

- **The Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005**  
(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/meth/etc/updnational.html>)

Although results are yet to be seen, this federal act includes the restriction of sales of common cold medications containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine such as Sudafed, the monitoring of chemical production, imports, and exports in the United States, and by enforcing stricter punishments on meth offenders who either put children in danger or use government property.

With much prompting from the Office of National Drug Control Policy, President Bush has proposed a budget for 2007 that includes \$40 million to be used for the cleaning up of meth lab sites. While this is a 100% increase in funding from the 2006 budget, President Bush has transferred monetary support once used for anti-drug programs to the Department of Justice where he feels that the money will be better focused against illegal drug use with the help federal agencies.

- **Drug Rehabilitation Centers** (<http://www.drug-rehabs.org/faqs/FAQ-meth.php>)

Now more than ever, with the availability of the Internet, help for any addiction is readily accessible. With the click of a mouse, those addicted can find support and even check into rehab centers nearby in a very discreet manner. The methamphetamine epidemic has made such a negative impact on our country that we have no choice but to provide meth users with cutting edge treatment in hopes to prevent this drug's future popularity.

### **Additional Internet Resources:**

- Stop Drugs.org  
([www.stopdrugs.org/methamphetamines.html](http://www.stopdrugs.org/methamphetamines.html))
- Methamphetamines, A Guide for Parents and Other Caregivers  
([www.health.org/govpubs/ms704b/](http://www.health.org/govpubs/ms704b/))

- DEA Briefs and Background  
([www.dea.gov/concern/amphetamines.html](http://www.dea.gov/concern/amphetamines.html))

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