

Methamphetamines on the Rise in Nebraska

Methamphetamine had nearly dropped off the radar when opioid overdoses skyrocketed in 2016 and 2017. Now methamphetamine use is on the rise, particularly in Nebraska.

A recent report by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics found that fatal overdoses involving stimulants rose 37% between 2016 and 2017. Fentanyl was the highest at 38%, followed by heroin at 22%, cocaine at 21% and methamphetamine at 13%. The CDC also found that the drug of choice varied based on geographic location. Fentanyl is more likely to be involved in a fatal overdose in the eastern part of the United States. Methamphetamine is more likely to be involved in states west of the Mississippi River, like Nebraska, South Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming etc. Methamphetamine use had dipped over 10 years ago when lawmakers put restrictions on the purchase of over-the-counter decongestant pseudoephedrine, like Sudafed, which is an ingredient used to make methamphetamine. However, methamphetamine is back and wreaking havoc in Nebraska (NPR).



The Omaha Division of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) saw a 31% increase in meth seizures between 2018 and 2019 (Fox 42 KPTM). Methamphetamine is more likely to be found in rural areas of Nebraska than in urban areas. Methamphetamine is primarily making its way into Nebraska via our interstate system and highways, but it can also be sent through the mail. In Nebraska, methamphetamine is involved in more child welfare cases than any other substance and contributes to many violent and property crimes (Omaha World Herald).

Methamphetamine, or meth, is a highly addictive stimulant that effects the central nervous system and is also known as crystal, meth, ice and speed. Meth looks like fragments of glass, cloudy crystal or bluish white rocks. Users smoke, snort or swallow meth. They may also soak meth in a liquid and inject it into the body. The high that a user achieves from using meth occurs almost immediately after use and can last for several hours, which makes it very appealing to users. Users then experience a crash, causing them to experience unpleasant feelings like depression and fatigue. These unpleasant feelings often motivate the person to use more meth to counteract the feelings (National Institute on Drug Abuse).

Short term effects of meth use are increased wakefulness, decreased appetite, rapid heart rate and high blood pressure. Long term effects include addiction, weight loss, dental issues, skin sores from intense itching, anxiety, sleeping problems and changes in behavior. Meth can cause changes to the brain, which can impact coordination and one's ability to learn. Furthermore, meth can also alter the areas of the brain that involve emotions and memory. Long-term users may also experience paranoia and hallucinations.

Meth is made from house products like paint thinner and cleaners, batteries and over-the-counter cold medicines. The combination of these materials can be extremely dangerous. Fortunately, law enforcement officers are not finding meth labs like they were in the early 2000's. Meth is now primarily being produced in Mexico. The methamphetamine that is coming into the US is over 90% potency and it is significantly cheaper than it was in the early 2000's. A combination of low cost, high potency and a high lasting for 4 to 12 hours, makes meth very attractive to users.

According to the Youth Risk and Behavior Survey, meth use by high school students was only 3% in 2017 compared to 6.3% in 2005. It is important to keep in mind that meth users do not typically start using meth first. They begin abusing other drugs, like prescription medications and marijuana, then move to meth in an attempt to get a longer lasting, more intense high that they cannot achieve with other drugs. General education and awareness can help prevent youth from using drugs of any kind. Parental engagement and involvement in extracurricular activities can also prevent youth from using drugs.

Resources:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/pep18-03.pdf>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/methamphetamine>

References:

<http://netnebraska.org/node/1149970>

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<https://fox42kptm.com/news/local/dea-sees-spike-in-methamphetamine-seizures>

https://www.omaha.com/news/crime/as-nation-faces-opioid-epidemic-in-nebraska-and-iowa-meth/article_87acfe3a-4708-5207-9271-3a158dc66ece.html

<https://www.local10.com/health/fentanyl-deadliest-drug-in-us-but-meth-kills-more-in-some-places>