



## Questions and Answers About Methamphetamines

Human Development and Family Studies Extension

Known as America's own home-grown drug, methamphetamine is an addictive stimulant that has toxic effects on the central nervous system and high potential for abuse and addiction. Because it is cheap and easy to make, it has become a major threat to rural America, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. The drug is also versatile — it can be swallowed, snorted, smoked or injected, which influences how quickly one becomes high and addicted to the drug. Consuming meth in any way is extremely dangerous, but smoking or injecting the drug rapidly delivers the largest amount to the brain and central nervous system. Treatment for methamphetamine use jumped from about 21,000 patients in 1993 to nearly 117,000 in 2003. And in 2006, an estimated 731,000 people, aged 12 or older, used methamphetamine.

### How is meth made?

Some of the ingredients most commonly used to make meth are over-the-counter cold and asthma medications containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine; red phosphorus; hydrochloric acid; anhydrous ammonia; drain cleaner; battery acid; lye; lantern fuel and antifreeze. Some meth



includes large amounts of industrial and agricultural chemicals. In one year the average meth “cook” teaches 10 people how to make the drug.

### What does meth look like?

Depending on how it is made, meth ranges in color from white to brown or from pink to red, and can even be various shades of yellow or green. Meth is made into pills, powder or chunks. Street names for meth include speed, chalk, ice, crystal, crank and glass. Crystal meth resembles rock candy or chunks of ice or crystal.

### How can I tell if someone is using meth?

Those who use meth may appear anxious or nervous. They may engage

in incessant talking and exhibit extreme moodiness and irritability. Meth users often engage in repetitious behavior, such as picking at their skin or pulling out their hair. They also have trouble sleeping and may stay awake for days. Meth users may also exhibit a false sense of confidence and power, aggressive or violent behavior, disinterest in previously enjoyed activities and severe depression. Physical signs include red eyes with dilated pupils, sweaty skin and weight loss.

### What does a meth lab look like?

A typical meth lab includes a collection of chemical bottles, hoses and pressurized cylinders. The cylinders can come in many forms, such as modified propane tanks, fire extinguishers, scuba tanks and soda dispensers. The tanks contain anhydrous ammonia or hydrochloric acid, both of which are extremely poisonous and corrosive substances. Fires and explosions often occur during the meth-making process.

Additional signs of a meth lab include:

- Unusually strong chemical smells such as ether, ammonia (smells like cat urine) and acetone (smells like fingernail polish)

- An excess amount of cold medicine containing ephedrine or pseudo-ephedrine (empty pill bottles or blister packs)
- Propane or Freon tanks with bent or tampered valves or fittings that are corroded, spray-painted or burned
- Starter fluid cans opened from the bottom
- Heating sources such as hotplates or torches
- An excess of coffee filters
- An excess of baggies
- An excess of matches
- An excess of lithium batteries
- Cookware with white residue
- Glassware, Mason jars or other glass containers
- Plastic tubing
- Funnels
- Hoses leading from inside to outside (for ventilation)
- Soft drink bottles with hoses
- Drain cleaner, paint thinner, denatured alcohol, ammonia, acid, starter fluid, antifreeze, hydrogen peroxide, rock salt or iodine
- Lantern or camp stove fuel
- Iodine- or chemical-stained bathrooms or kitchen fixtures
- Evidence of chemical waste dumping
- Excessive amounts of trash, particularly chemical containers, coffee filters with red stains, duct tape rolls, empty cans of paint thinner or pieces of red-stained cloth around the property
- Secretive or unfriendly occupants
- Security measures or attempts to ensure privacy such as “No Trespassing” or “Beware of Dog” signs, fences and large trees or shrubs
- Drawn curtains or windows that are blackened or covered with aluminum

## How does meth impact a person's health?

### Immediate effects of methamphetamine abuse may include:

- Increased attention and decreased fatigue
- Increased activity
- Decreased appetite
- A euphoric feeling
- Increased respiratory rate
- Dangerously high body temperature
- Convulsions

### Long-term effects of methamphetamine abuse may include:

- Anxiety and anxiousness
- Severe weight loss
- Changes to brain and central nervous system
- Damage to the heart or other major organs
- Tremors or uncontrolled motor activity
- Hallucinations
- A disturbed mood, including thoughts of homicide or suicide.
- Violent or paranoid behavior
- Amphetamine psychosis

### Symptoms of withdrawal may include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Paranoia
- Aggression
- Intense drug craving

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

## How does living near a meth lab or meth users impact children?

Meth labs are extremely dangerous environments for children. The chemicals used to make meth are highly toxic and easily explosive.

The drugs and chemicals used in meth can be harmful to children's health. Children living in meth labs

often accidentally ingest meth through the secondhand smoke and fumes that are released during the cooking process. Meth and the chemicals used to make it contaminate a home's living area and water supplies long after meth has been produced. This puts children at risk over the long term.

Children living with meth users are also exposed to abuse, neglect and highly unstable environments that endanger their lives. Between 2000 and 2005, meth lab seizures by local and federal law enforcement affected more than 15,000 children. Nearly 4,000 children were exposed to toxic chemicals, 96 children suffered lab-related injuries and eight children died.

## Will methamphetamine hurt my baby while I'm pregnant?

Using meth while pregnant can cause a baby to be born addicted to meth and suffer from birth defects, low birth weight, tremors and excessive crying. Later in life, the child may suffer attention deficit disorder and behavior disorders. Mothers who use meth are also more likely to neglect and abuse their baby or children (including "shaken baby syndrome").

## How can I help someone who is addicted to meth?

Professional help is generally required. The Partnership for a Drug Free America Web site offers advice on how to help people who are addicted to meth. Find more information online at: [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org).

*This guide was written by Jacquelyn Benson, graduate student, Human Development and Family Studies, University of Missouri.*

*Megan Roodhouse, Human Development and Family Studies Extension, and Brian Bowles, MU Extension's ParentLink, reviewed this guide.*

## Resources

*Meth and child welfare: Promising solutions for children, their parents and grandparents* (2006). Generations United. [ipath.gu.org/documents/A0/Meth\\_Child\\_Welfare\\_Final\\_cover.pdf](http://ipath.gu.org/documents/A0/Meth_Child_Welfare_Final_cover.pdf).

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*Methamphetamine Use: Lessons Learned* (2006). Hunt, D., Kuck, S., Truitt, L. U.S. Department of Justice, [ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/209730.pdf](http://ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/209730.pdf).

Call MU Extension's **ParentLink** WarmLine for free information on ANY parenting, relationship or nutrition question. Call about specific situations, developmental stages, or services you are looking for.

**Toll-free: 1-800-552-8522**

**En Espanol: 1-888-460-0008**

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To learn more, please visit the MU Extension Web site at:  
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