

Crystal Methamphetamine

Crystal Methamphetamine (also called ice, crystal, jib, crystal meth, chalk or speed) is part of a family of drugs known as amphetamines. It is a synthetic (human made) drug that is not legally available in any form in Canada. It can be snorted or injected from a powder, swallowed in a tablet form or smoked from crystals. The way it is taken can affect how quickly the drug works, but the side effects of all forms are dangerous.

Did you know?

Crystal methamphetamine, or “crystal meth”, is made using common household ingredients that are cooked together. The process of cooking crystal meth is very dangerous and produces many toxic chemicals.

The main ingredients are ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine, which are found in cold medicines. Crystal meth can also contain battery acid, drain cleaner, paint thinner and antifreeze.

Crystal meth use can make it feel like bugs are crawling under the skin, causing picking and leading to sores.

Short-term Effects

The short term effects of crystal meth can be dangerous and unpredictable. People that take crystal meth are often restless and seem to have a lot of energy. It can make them feel very awake and alert, even if they have not slept. They talk very fast and their minds race with thoughts and ideas. The drug can also cause a dryness or lack of saliva in the mouth, headaches or dizziness, stomach aches, muscle spasms, difficulty breathing, raised blood pressure, an irregular or fast heartbeat, a rise in body temperature (hyperthermia) and fainting. Some people also experience paranoia and hallucinations, causing them to act aggressively or become suddenly violent.

Long-term Effects

One of the most common side effects of long term crystal meth use is called “meth mouth”. Because the drug decreases the amount of saliva in the mouth, bacteria are able to grow quickly, staining the teeth black and causing cavities. Users often have no appetite, so over time they suffer from poor nutrition and weight loss. Users are at a high risk of heart disease or attack, stroke, convulsions and Parkinson’s disease.

Long-term use of crystal meth can cause long lasting damage to the areas of the brain responsible for memory and emotion.

Even after someone has stopped using crystal meth for a long period of time, they can still have symptoms of psychosis. This is a mental health condition in which people can’t tell the difference between what is real and what isn’t.

How does it work?

How quickly the effects of crystal meth take hold depend on how it is taken. If it is injected or smoked, it can move through the bloodstream to the brain very quickly. If it is swallowed or snorted, it can take up to 20 minutes to be absorbed into the blood. Once in the system, it causes the body to release a chemical called dopamine, which causes a rush of pleasure or euphoria.

Dependency

Once addicted, it is very difficult to stop using crystal meth. Suddenly stopping the drug can cause severe cravings, as well as feelings of being anxious, depressed and tired. Other withdrawal symptoms include feeling hungry, stomach pain, headache and shortness of breath.

Tolerance to crystal meth builds up very quickly, so regular users need more and more of the drug to feel its effects.

Crystal Methamphetamine and pregnancy

The effects of crystal meth on pregnant women are not very well understood, but there is evidence that it can lead to premature birth. Babies born to mothers that used crystal meth during pregnancy are often undersized, are not as active as other babies, and can have heart and brain problems.

People who use crystal meth are more likely to make risky decisions such as having unprotected sex or sharing needles with other people. This exposes them to diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

Who can you contact for help regarding drug use?

Contact your local Addictions/Mental Health Services office, doctor or other health care provider if you need more information. To locate services near you:

- Visit saskatchewan.ca/addictions.
- Visit HealthLine Online at healthlineonline.ca.
- Call HealthLine at 811. Trained staff are available to provide mental health and addictions crisis support, in a safe and confidential manner.



An overdose of crystal meth can lead to seizures, a rise in body temperature, heart problems, stroke and death.

NOTE: This material is for information only and should not replace the advice from an Addictions or Mental Health Counsellor, doctor or other health care provider.

To access fact sheet sources please contact the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health at (306) 787-7239.