

Crystal Methamphetamine

Definition: Crystal meth is a stimulant drug also known as meth, tina, yaba, crystal, jib, speed, crank, ice, sketch, cryssie, or glass. It is a white, odourless powder that can be snorted, smoked, injected, and eaten. Meth does not occur naturally. It is a synthetic drug that is made from a combination of chemical ingredients. Ingredients might include iodine, hydrochloric acid, drain cleaner, battery acid, lye, antifreeze, pool acid, sodium hydroxide, lithium/sodium metal, red phosphorous, or anhydrous ammonia.

Q: What are the effects of crystal meth?

A: Crystal meth is a highly psychologically addictive substance. The effects of meth can last around 6-12 hours; after the initial “rush” the user may feel a period of euphoria, however, during this time, users often also become agitated which may lead to violence.

Crystal meth affects the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) by increasing levels of alertness, exhilaration, and euphoria. Crystal meth can also suppress hunger and fatigue. Negative side effects include loss of short term memory and severe mood swings involving anxiety, periods of rage, hyperactivity, suicidal tendencies, aggression, cardiac arrhythmia, increased blood pressure, malnutrition, itching, delusions, nausea, and depression. Users may engage in self-destructive behaviours and long-term users may have hallucinations.

At higher doses users can experience paranoia, agitation and violent behavior. Chronic use can lead to “meth mouth” where the user experiences severe tooth decay and tooth loss. Users can also develop a tolerance to the drug so that they have to take increasing amounts to experience the same effects.

Symptoms of withdrawal including strong cravings, irritability, lack of energy, increased appetite, sleep problems, depression, stomach pain, headaches, shortness of breath, mental confusion, restlessness, or tiredness. These symptoms usually appear 24 hours after the last use and can last up to 48 hours.

Potential long-term effects of crystal methamphetamine use

- ❖ Structural changes to the brain and memory loss
- ❖ Blurred vision
- ❖ Difficulty completing complex tasks
- ❖ Movement disorders and loss of coordination
- ❖ Slowed reaction times to stimuli
- ❖ Mental confusion, hallucinations, delusions, and feelings of paranoia
- ❖ Drug-induced psychosis (hallucinations or false perceptions, e.g. scratching at “bugs” on skin or hearing voices)
- ❖ Brain toxicity, kidney, liver, and/or lung failure, and heart disease

Recent surveys report that 68-73% of street-involved youth in Vancouver have used crystal meth at least once!

A recent survey with four B.C. school districts showed that up to 8% of students in grades 6-12 report having tried crystal meth in the 2005 school year!

Local resources

www.crystalmeth.bc.com

www.no2meth.ca

www.methwatch.ca

BC Nurses Line

(604) 215-4700

1-866-215-4700

BC Alcohol and Drug
Information and Referral

(604) 660-9382

1-800-663-1441

Q: If crystal meth is so harmful, why do people use it?

A: Crystal meth is used socially, for example at parties or at clubs with friends. Because it reduces hunger, some people use it as an aid to dieting. Students may use it to help them stay alert to study as it decreases the need for sleep. Street youth may use meth to help them to survive on the street as it reduces their need for food and sleep. Meth is popular because it is cheap, available, and long-lasting.

Q: How is crystal meth made?

A: The production of meth is an easy yet highly dangerous process. Meth is created by heating together chemical ingredients, which creates a serious risk of fire and explosions. Meth can be produced almost anywhere and people living near meth labs can unknowingly be exposed to dangerous toxins, fumes, and hazardous byproducts. Chemical vapours released during the production of meth can be absorbed by wood, fabric, wallboard, and carpeting, contaminating the area with toxic chemicals and residues that remain long after the batch of meth is produced. Each pound of meth produced in a lab can result in as much as 5 pounds of toxic waste which is often dumped into streams, rivers, and sewage systems by meth cooks trying to dispose of evidence of their illegal operations.

Q: How do I know if my child is using meth? What can I do?

A: Signs that your child may be using meth include changes in their appearance and health, such as weight loss, restlessness, or insomnia. There may be a decrease in their performance at school. They may begin to relate to you differently, with mood swings, avoidance, or sudden violence. If you suspect that your child is using meth, you may be able to enter your child into a Detox program or Narcotics Anonymous. For more information or referrals visit the resources listed below or call the BC Centre for Social Responsibility (www.bccsr.ca) at (604) 870-5940.

Resources

- Health Canada. <http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/meth-fact-sheet>
- Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. Crystal meth fact sheet. <http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/crystalmeth/pdf/MethFacts.pdf>
- National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/headsup/support/metamphetamine.pdf>
- Vancouver Island Health Authority. http://crystalmethbc.com/viha_teen_talk.pdf