

Georgia Department of Human Resources

Methamphetamine Use in Georgia

What is methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is a stimulant drug that acts powerfully on the central nervous system. It is addictive and has serious effects on individuals who use the drug. It causes increased wakefulness, increased physical activity, decreased appetite, increased heart rate and elevated blood pressure. The drug damages nerve cells and over time can produce symptoms similar to Parkinson's disease, a serious movement disorder. People who come down from a "meth high" experience severe depression and often try to counter the withdrawal by using alcohol or marijuana.

Because of its powerful effects on the central nervous system, methamphetamine addiction requires specialized treatment. The most successful treatment involves lengthy intensive therapy in group treatment programs, frequent drug testing and months of aftercare, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Methamphetamine is made in illegal laboratories. It is sold on the street for \$500 to \$1000 per ounce or for \$80 to \$100 per gram. Street methamphetamine is called "speed" or "chalk". Methamphetamine hydrochlorate, a product that looks like clear crystals, is called "ice," "crystal" or "glass."

Why is it popular?

The drug is relatively cheap and it can be made from ordinary items available at many retail outlets, such as cold and allergy medicines (ephedrine and pseudoephedrine), rock salt, rubbing alcohol, drain cleaner, farm fertilizer and paint thinner. \$100 worth of materials can be quickly converted into \$1000 worth of street drugs.

Methamphetamine is also popular because it produces a long-lasting high – effects last up to eight hours. This has contributed to use of the drug by young people involved in "rave culture" at all night music clubs.

Availability and use in Georgia

The drug was first used primarily by truck drivers and blue collar workers. It was more prevalent in the Western United States.

Today methamphetamine is used by a more diverse population. More young people use methamphetamine and it is a growing problem among college students. It is not yet a primary threat in the Atlanta metropolitan area, but methamphetamine use is a serious problem in smaller towns and cities – particularly in places with large Mexican and Hispanic populations. Methamphetamine use in Georgia has grown fastest in North and Central Georgia. It is the primary drug threat in Dalton and Macon.

The first labs were based in California, Arizona, Utah, Texas and Mexico.

Mexican traffickers sell the drug nationally now, and in the last decade smaller local labs have grown up in Georgia and the Southeast.

In Georgia, admissions to publicly funded programs for methamphetamine use increased from 263 in 1997 to 953 in 2001, according to the *Georgia Drug Threat Assessment* published by the National Drug Intelligence Center. Georgia law enforcement officers shut down 29 meth labs in 1999. They raided 439 labs in the first nine months of 2003.

The danger for children

People who manufacture methamphetamine in their homes often have children. According to the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, police have found 113 children living in homes used as meth labs in Georgia over the last two years. These children are exposed to very serious dangers:

- **Exposure to dangerous substances** - children may swallow toxic substances or inhale toxic fumes. Prolonged exposure leads to damage to organs.
- **Toxic waste** – the production of one pound of methamphetamine produces seven pounds of toxic waste. Law enforcement has to decontaminate lab sites and the children they find there.
- **Fire** – Chemicals are cooked at heat exceeding 200 degrees. In March 2004, three children were killed in a trailer fire in Spalding County. The trailer contained combustible ingredients used to make methamphetamine.

Georgia's response

- The General Assembly increased criminal penalties for manufacture, sale or possession of methamphetamine in its 2003 session. The law made it a felony to steal or possess anhydrous ammonia for the purposes of manufacturing drugs. It also made it a felony to possess more than 300 tablets of cold medicine for this purpose.
- The General Assembly passed a child endangerment bill in 2004. The bill makes criminal negligence a felony punishable for up to ten years in prison and adds additional penalties for making meth in the presence of children.
- GBI officers are training DHR's Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) child protection caseworkers to recognize signs that drugs are being made in homes with children.
- Law enforcement officers are notifying DFCS when they are planning a raid on homes where children live.
- DHR's Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases regional staff in North Georgia are training substance abuse providers to recognize and treat methamphetamine addiction.