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THE FACT IS . . .

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"ICE" Poses a New Threat To Public Health

"The Drug of the Nineties," "More Menacing Than Crack," and "The Ice Age Cometh," shout the newspaper headlines. They are all describing the emergence of a dangerous new drug — a smokable form of methamphetamine commonly called "ice." This fact sheet answers questions about "ice," providing the facts, background information, and consequences of this growing epidemic. Also provided are resources that may be helpful to those seeking further assistance.

What exactly is "ice," and how is it used?

"Ice" is a smokable crystal form of methamphetamine. Methamphetamine is a stimulant, also known as "speed" or "crystal meth." It is a powerful, synthetic stimulant. "Ice" is a large, clear crystal of high purity (greater than 90 percent). The smoke is odorless, and the residue that stays in the pipe can be re-smoked.

Methamphetamine is usually smoked in "runs," or periods of continuous use averaging five days in length, with an average of 4 days between smoking periods. The few days of abstinence are generally spent sleeping. Marijuana and alcohol are often used to "come down" from a methamphetamine high.

The cost of crystal methamphetamine varies, but typically a gram sells for \$300-\$400 and a "paper" (one-tenth of a gram or less) sells for \$50.

Who uses "ice?"

Preliminary findings of a study conducted in Hawaii, where there is a serious "ice" epidemic, suggest that it is used by a wide variety of people. Most users range in age from late teens to early thirties. Roughly one in six users is female. Among women, there is a significant incidence of use among housewives.

Other users include bikers, street gangs, and certain West Coast ethnic groups, e.g., Filipinos and some other Asians. Methamphetamine use affects all socioeconomic levels, but incidence is higher in blue collar professions. Many users are also sellers, supporting their use through dealing.

What are the physical effects of methamphetamine use?

The use of "ice" typically results in an increase in blood pressure and a "pounding heart" sensation. Irregular heartbeats may also occur after high doses (100 mg). Very high doses may result in permanent damage to blood vessels in the brain and result in death.

Other physical effects include dilated pupils, blurred vision, dry mouth, increased breathing rate, severe headache, tremors of the hands and fingers, nausea, excessive sweating, and dizziness. A decrease in appetite may result in rapid weight loss and malnutrition.

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What are the effects of "ice" on a user's behavior?

Users of methamphetamine report increased physical activity, restlessness, and anxiety. They can also become very talkative and repeat simple acts. Other behavioral effects include impaired judgment, impulsiveness, and chronic insomnia. "Ice" users may also experience hallucinations and paranoia. They can be difficult to understand because of abrupt shifts in thought and speech.

Users of very high doses may suffer from "amphetamine psychosis," which closely resembles paranoid schizophrenia. This side effect may be seen as early as 36 to 48 hours after the ingestion of a single, large dose of methamphetamine.

Another problem associated with methamphetamine use is the ingestion of alcohol and other depressants to counter the effects of the stimulant, a practice that readily leads to multi-drug use.

How addictive is methamphetamine, and what are the symptoms of addiction?

Methamphetamine is very addictive. In its smokable form, the drug reaches the brain quickly. According to a recent study, users reported rapid addiction to methamphetamine, some of them after only a few times of use. They develop tolerance to the drug, requiring higher doses to achieve the expected effects.

Frequent users of methamphetamine have reported withdrawal symptoms during periods of abstinence. The severity of these symptoms depends on the extent of use. These include severe depression, decreased energy, agitation, anxiety, and limited ability to experience pleasure. The "crash" is an extreme exhaustion that immediately follows a binge, creating the feeling of an overwhelmingly powerful need for more of the drug.

Where can I find help?

The following agencies and groups can provide information for users and those who care about them:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

1-800-662-HELP — This toll-free hotline is run by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) as an information and referral line that directs callers to treatment centers in their communities.

National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)

(202) 783-6868 — Each State has a toll-free hotline for information on prescription drugs. For the number of the agency nearest you, call NASADAD, or write: NASADAD, 444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20001.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

Narcotics Anonymous is made up of voluntary groups of men and women who meet together to find and keep a drug-free lifestyle. There are no dues or fees. Your local directory assistance operator can give you the telephone number of the NA group nearest you. Or you may contact NA World Service Office, P.O. Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409; (818) 780-3951.

NarAnon

NarAnon is a voluntary group of spouses, relatives, and friends of addicts. NarAnon helps families and friends cope with the problems that arise from another's drug use. It helps them to understand the addict and themselves through sharing their thoughts and feelings. Consult your local telephone directory or operator for the location of the group nearest you. Or you may contact NarAnon Family Group, World Service Office, P.O. Box 2562, Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA 92704; (213) 547-5800.

Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE)

1-800-241-9746 — A national resource and information center, PRIDE refers concerned parents to parent groups in their areas; gives information on how parents can form a local group; provides telephone advice and referrals to emergency health centers; and offers a series of drug information tapes that callers can listen to, free of charge, by calling after 5:00 p.m. Eastern time.

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

1-800-729-6686 — NCADI provides information about all drugs, including alcohol. The Clearinghouse can send you material on many subjects related to alcohol and other drug use. You can also write to NCADI at the following address: NCADI, P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20852.

Local or County Groups

Most areas have groups that have formed to meet the special needs of local people with drug problems. Consult the community service listings in your local telephone directory. There you will find the numbers of your local Health Department, Mental Health Services, or Drug and Alcohol Abuse Services.