

Arbiter Online

Meth: A darker side of Idaho

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Methamphetamine, more commonly known as meth, ice, crank or speed has become one of Idaho's most popular drugs. The Idaho Meth Project ranks Idaho fourth in the country for meth use by 12- to 17-year-olds and 18- to 25-year-olds. Idaho ranks seventh for lifetime meth use by high school students. Over 12 million Americans have tried meth and it has more than 26 million users world wide with figures growing everyday.

Meth is one of the cheapest drugs to make; it requires only synthetic ingredients, ones that can be easily found at the local pharmacy and hardware store. It can be snorted, smoked, injected or swallowed. One hit, about a fourth of a gram, costs as little as \$25. Cocaine video, "The Most Dangerous Drug" states that meth is three and a half times more powerful than cocaine and the typical hit can keep the user high anywhere from six to 12 hours.

Users often describe their high as euphoric. Chris, a current BSU student and recovering meth user described his feelings while on meth as an invincible high – he asked that we not use his last name.

"I felt invincible, like nothing could hurt me. I've never felt as high," he said.

An article in PBS's Frontline explained that the pleasure sensation is caused by the release of dopamine in the brain. Normally our brains work on a reward system, when we do something that causes pleasure, e.g. exercise, ride a roller coaster or even have sex, dopamine is released. When one achieves orgasm our dopamine level rise from 100 units to 200 units. A meth user will see his or her dopamine level increase from the base level to 1250 units. The human body is not made to handle the massive increase and over time, long term use causes damage.

Along with impairing cognitive function and memory, meth actually changes the user's brain chemistry. Over time it destroys the dopamine receptors as well as severely damages the wiring in the brain's pleasure centers. Thus making impossible for chronic users to feel pleasure at all, which is why the user requires more and more meth to maintain the same high each time. Studies have shown that with over a year of sobriety, dopamine receptors can be regrown and some of the wiring repaired, but memory loss and motor skills show little or no improvement, and impaired cognitive ability seem to be permanent.

Although the affects of meth can be quite intoxicating, the side effects show a darker side. Users report feeling anxious, paranoid and aggressive. There are also many reported instances where, while high on the drug, users will literally scratch and rip their skin because they have the feeling of bugs crawling over them. Due, in part to the fact that while high on the drug, the user exhibits an increase in aggression, they are more likely to commit a crime.

According to the Idaho Meth Project, during 2007, more than 70 percent of federal drug offenses in Idaho involved methamphetamine. As early as 2005, Idaho had the highest increase in arrests due to methamphetamine, up 90 percent from the prior year. Over 52 percent of Idaho inmates directly attribute meth use to their incarceration. In Idaho's county jail, 89 percent of female offenders say that they have a problem with meth. Of that pool of users, 73 percent say that meth is their drug of choice.

Interestingly enough, methamphetamine is a DEA Schedule II drug, meaning it has medicinal properties i.e. a medical use for the treatment of narcolepsy, attention deficit disorders and obesity. Marijuana is listed as a Schedule I drug, classified as having no medical purpose.

Recovering methamphetamine addicts and chronic users have a 3 percent success rate, meaning 97 percent have a relapse. Idaho's share of meth treatment in the U.S is 2.6 times higher than its relative share of the U.S. population. It's not just that meth wreaks havoc on the entire body but it sucks users in like no other drug. Attaining sobriety from meth is possibly one of the hardest things imaginable.

"You honestly have no idea how hard it was to get where I am today, becoming sober was the hardest thing I've ever done," Chris said. "I just got so depressed and the first month was hell. I got sent to a treatment facility in Oregon and they made sure that I didn't have any access to any sort of drug." I didn't know how addicted I was until I stopped. I mean I would wake up some nights sweating and hyperventilating cause my body just craved it. For the first month I was so tired but I couldn't sleep."

To get more information or get help, contact RADAR Network Center 1910 University Drive Boise, Idaho 208-426-347; the Idaho Meth Project, or the Idaho Care line (dial 2-1-1)