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Meth survey shows drug is appealing to some teens

Statistics place it as a major contributor to Idaho's prison population. But one in five Idaho teens see little or no risk in trying methamphetamine once or twice, according to a state survey commissioned by the Idaho Meth Project.

The 2007 Idaho Meth Use & Attitudes Survey, conducted last fall by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media, quizzed 3,000 teens, 350 18- to 24-year-olds and 400 parents about their views on meth and its prevalence in the state. The results, Meth Project Executive Director Megan Ronk said, are sad but unsurprising: Many teens and young adults see potential benefits and little risk in taking meth, find the drug readily available and have had limited discussions about the drug with their peers or parents.

"Unfortunately, we confirmed why this initiative is so important," Ronk said Tuesday, the day the survey was released. "Those are exactly the sort of people we are trying to target with this campaign."

The survey, Ronk said, places Idaho on par with Montana two years ago, before that state began its anti-meth campaign the Idaho project is based on. Among other results, 45 percent of young adults reported it would be "very" or "somewhat easy" for them to acquire the drug. Fourteen percent of young adults and 4 percent of teens admit to having tried it, compared to 30 percent and 14 percent, respectively, who have been offered meth.

About 38 percent of young adults believe the drug helps you lose weight. And though 80 percent of teens "strongly" disapprove of trying it even once or twice, 25 percent say their friends would not give them a "hard time" if they did. "Looking at how easy it is to acquire — That's a fairly alarming statistic, I would think, especially for parents," Ronk said. "That stresses the importance of having that conversation (with your parents)."

But half of young adults and 36 percent of teens said they've never discussed meth with their parents, though only 12 percent of parents said they've never brought the topic up. Teens who have talked with their parents about meth are more likely than other teens to tell their friends not to use meth, according to the survey.

Four of five parents said they would talk to their kids if they found out the latter were using meth. But they seemed less sure of other options, with only half or less finding a treatment center or speaking to school officials or spouses. George Brown, chairman of Southern Idaho Partners Against Drugs, said statistics like that are why the group holds town hall meetings such as one planned for the evening of Jan. 31 at the College of Southern Idaho. "What do you do when you have a loved one who is hooked on meth? Who do you go to?" Brown said. "We will cover all the bases."

Idaho Meth Project staff will continue to analyze the survey, Ronk said. But she's confident so far that the survey shows her project's media campaign is aimed at the right people. The survey will be repeated next fall to measure any influence the campaign might have had.