

Methamphetamine use increasing again, researchers find

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(Medical Xpress) -- Use of methamphetamines is on the rise nationally after a decrease a few years ago, according to university researchers.

Use of meth dropped significantly in 2007 and 2008 after laws limiting the availability of pseudoephedrine went into effect made it much harder to obtain key ingredients.

However, indicators of meth use – reported identification of local meth labs, admissions to emergency rooms and treatment centers, arrest records and more – show that use increased in 2009 and 2010.

Jane Maxwell, a senior research scientist in the School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin, and Mary Lynn Brecht, a researcher in the Integrated Substance Abuse Programs at the University of California, Los Angeles, reported their findings in the journal *Addictive Behaviors* in December 2011.

Meth purveyors are getting around restrictions on pseudoephedrine by turning to a manufacturing method that uses different chemicals, according to Maxwell.

The recent increase in use as seen in the indicators is not as high as use mid-decade, but Maxwell said she's worried that the stage is set for a repeat. That concern is reflected in the title of the paper "Methamphetamine: Here We Go Again?"

For example, there were more than 18,000 meth lab accidents in 2003, according to the National Clandestine Laboratory Database and National Laboratory Information System. Accidents dropped to about 6,000 in 2007 and rose to more than 10,000 in 2010.

Maxwell said she's fearful that policymakers, looking at the mid-decade decrease, will curtail funding for people in recovery from meth abuse.

"I'm concerned there's going to be a de-emphasis on treatment for meth users," she said.

She said there is still a need for treatment programs. In another study, Maxwell has found that many meth users are mentally and physically impaired.

"We need to keep focused on methamphetamine as a drug that demands and needs serious treatment," she said.

It's not surprising that meth use is rebounding, Maxwell said. That's the pattern during the decades that meth has been used.

"It really is a cyclical pattern of use is up, we put in barriers to producing it or to prevent it from being obtained and that takes it down for a little while," she said. "But then it goes back up again."

The recent down cycle occurred after sale of ephedrine and [pseudoephedrine](#) were severely restricted.

The up cycle began as makers of the drug in Mexico reverted to another method called P2P for the principal chemicals involved.

The P2P process is harder and more time consuming, but manufacturers have sharpened their skills.

"It's a much more difficult process to produce meth using it, but these guys appear to be very good chemists, and the potency and purity is continuing to go up," she said.

Purity has increased to 90 percent even as the price per gram has dropped to about \$89, according to a federal Drug Enforcement Agency database and reported in the study.

Maxwell and Brecht conclude that meth has joined heroin and cocaine as a drug of chronic abuse in some communities no matter what steps are taken to curtail its supply and use.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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