

# Injuries tied to illegal meth labs on the rise: CDC

August 27 2015

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'Shake-and-bake' chemical explosions are one common, dangerous accident, agency report says.

(HealthDay)—Chemical burns, respiratory ailments and even deaths tied to accidents in illegal methamphetamine labs are on the rise in the United States, a new study shows.

Overall, 162 people were injured between 2001 and 2012 in the five states covered by the study. Those states were Louisiana, Oregon, Utah, New York and Wisconsin. The injuries included 26 children and 42 [law enforcement](#) officials, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

After 2005, legislation by states to restrict over-the-counter access to ingredients used by "meth" labs led to a drop in the number of injuries for a few years. But the lull didn't last.

"In 2008, as meth producers learned to circumvent laws and obtain restricted precursor drugs, and introduced the hazardous 'shake and bake' meth-making method," injuries began to rise again, reported a team led by CDC investigator Dr. Natalia Melnikova.

For the past two decades, officials have seen a rise in illegal meth labs throughout the country. In these hidden "kitchens," drug-making "cooks" fabricate methamphetamine using various ingredients, including ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, typically found in cold and cough medications.

States began to clamp down on access to ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in 2005, the CDC team noted. But meth makers figured out how to get around the laws by using fake names and buying small quantities from multiple locations.

Around 2008, the 'shake-and-bake' method of meth production became increasingly popular. "This method involves shaking smaller amounts of precursor chemicals in a two-liter [half-gallon] plastic bottle, which frequently bursts, causing burns and environmental contamination," Melnikova's team said.

In their study, her team reviewed data from over 1,300 meth lab-related "chemical incidents" in the five states. They found 162 injuries occurring in 87 incidents. Most (84 percent) of the injuries were so bad that people were sent to a hospital. That number included 19 children, all of whom required inpatient care.

Injuries are getting worse over time, the CDC team noted. In 2001-2004, 75 percent of meth lab-linked injuries required hospital care. By 2008-2012, that number had risen to 90 percent, the study found.

And, the researchers found that two adults died from meth lab

incidents—"one, who might have been a meth cook, was found dead in a meth laboratory; the second was a law enforcement officer," the researchers said.

Along with the 42 law enforcement officials who were injured, seven firefighters also sustained injuries in meth lab-related incidents, the study noted.

In terms of the types of injuries sustained, burns led the list (43 percent) followed by respiratory issues (37 percent), the researchers found.

Dangers lurk even after a meth lab is identified and closed down, because people can still come into contact with leftover hazardous materials.

"Employees working as cleanup contractors, or in housekeeping, patient intake and other high-risk occupations should be alerted to the dangers," the study authors said.

What can be done to reduce these dangerous incidents? According to Melnikova's team, tougher enforcement by states can help, but too often meth-making gangs simply skip over the border to a state with less strict regulations.

For example, after Mississippi passed strict laws restricting access to prescription meds used to source meth-lab ingredients, "meth-related chemical incidents increased in neighboring Louisiana," where laws weren't so tight, the CDC team said.

"To most effectively reduce meth production, a regional, rather than state-by-state approach," may be necessary, they noted.

More also needs to be done to properly train and protect law

enforcement officials and firefighters who are sent to meth labs.

The study authors also noted state laws aimed at protecting children from meth-linked injuries would help. For example, Georgia passed a law in 2004 mandating "serious penalties to meth producers if a child is present or is seriously injured during meth production," the researchers said.

The bottom line, according to Melnikova's team: "Public health outreach aimed at protecting the general public [including children] and [law enforcement officials](#), the groups most often injured in meth incidents, is urgently needed."

The study is published Aug. 27 in the CDC journal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

**More information:** There's more on methamphetamine addiction at the [U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse](#).

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Citation: Injuries tied to illegal meth labs on the rise: CDC (2015, August 27) retrieved 31 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-08-injuries-tied-illegal-meth-labs.html>

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