

People who use methamphetamine likely to report multiple chronic conditions

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Crystal methamphetamine. Credit: public domain

People who use methamphetamine are more likely to have health conditions, mental illness, and substance use disorders than people who do not use the drug, according to a new study by researchers at the Center for Drug Use and HIV/HCV Research (CDUHR) at NYU School of Global Public Health. The findings are published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

The use of methamphetamine—a highly addictive and illegal stimulant drug—has increased in recent years, as have overdose deaths. Methamphetamine can be toxic for multiple organs including the heart, lungs, liver, and neurological system, and injecting the drug can increase one's risk for [infectious diseases](#).

"Methamphetamine can complicate the management of existing [chronic illnesses](#), but we know little about the chronic disease profile of people who use it," said study author Benjamin Han, MD, a clinician-researcher in the Division of Geriatrics, Gerontology, and Palliative Care in the Department of Medicine at the University of California San Diego.

Using data from the 2015-2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults, the researchers estimated the prevalence of medical conditions, [mental illnesses](#), and other substance use among those who reported using methamphetamine within the past year.

Compared to adults who do not use the drug, people who use methamphetamine were nearly twice as likely to have medical multimorbidity (two or more chronic medical conditions), more than three times as likely to have mental illness, and more than four times as likely to have a [substance use disorder](#). Many have a combination of medical, mental, and substance use issues, including all three concurrently.

Of the chronic illnesses studied, people using methamphetamine had a higher prevalence of liver disease (hepatitis or cirrhosis), lung disease (COPD or asthma), and HIV/AIDS. The researchers also found that those using methamphetamine had a considerably higher likelihood of substance use disorders for all drugs studied, including heroin, prescription stimulants, prescription opioids, cocaine, and sedatives.

"Our results certainly do not suggest that meth use causes most of these conditions, but they should inform clinicians that this population is at risk. Future studies are needed to determine how dose and frequency of use relate to these conditions—for instance, occasional use on a night out versus chronic use that can lead to a host of adverse effects on the body," said study author Joseph Palamar, Ph.D., an associate professor of population health at NYU Grossman School of Medicine and a CDUHR researcher. "We also confirmed the well-known link between meth use and HIV, which can result from injection [drug use](#) or sexual transmission, but more research is needed to determine the extent to which meth use increases risk for STDs due to the drug's libido-enhancing effects."

The researchers note the importance of a harm reduction and patient-centered approach to care for people who use methamphetamines, and one that can coordinate management of mental illness, medical disease, and [substance use](#) disorders.

"Methamphetamine use adds complexity to the already-challenging care of adults who have multiple chronic conditions," added Han, who is also a CDUHR researcher. "Integrated interventions that can address the multiple conditions people are living with, along with associated social risks, are needed for this population."

More information: Benjamin H. Han et al, Multimorbidity Among US Adults Who Use Methamphetamine, 2015–2019, *Journal of General*

Internal Medicine (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s11606-021-06910-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-021-06910-6)

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