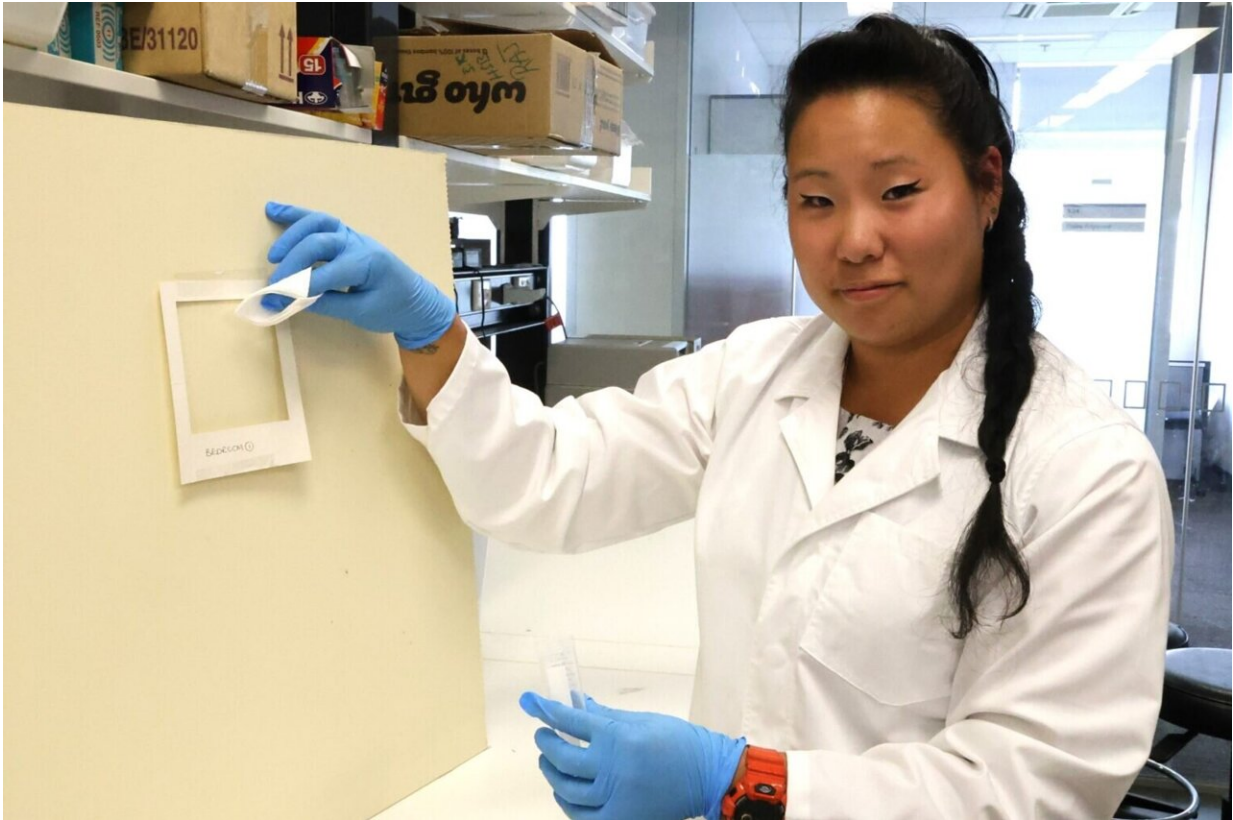


Meth houses: Time for more testing?

May 7 2024



Emma Kuhn, from Flinders University Environmental Health, demonstrates a wall swab method used to assess the absence or level of methamphetamine contamination – used to assess whether remediation action is required. Credit: Flinders University

A new Flinders University study has found less than 10% of suspected methamphetamine contamination in residences are reported to council

environmental health officers (EHOs), raising further concerns more regulations are needed to manage safety and health in the community.

The paper, "An Investigation into the Prevalence of Methamphetamine Related Enquiries to Local Government Environmental Health Officers," is [published](#) in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Australian guidelines for inspecting, testing and decontamination will reduce potential exposure to the illicit substance, including the emerging public health issue of third-hand exposure as meth residues may remain on surfaces such as walls and furniture for up to five years, experts warn.

Environmental health experts at Flinders warn the situation may worsen with property purchasers and renters being less critical of conditions and indoor spaces because of the housing shortage and turbulent market.

They say a regulatory body, adequate training and an accreditation process are necessary to act as a benchmark for those working in removal and testing—similar to asbestos testing and removal.

A previous Flinders study found that testing and decontamination methods for methamphetamine are highly varied in Australia, which further reflects irregularities with "an industry with no regulation."

"Local council EHOs are responsible for managing clandestine drug laboratories when notified by police and also for responding to public inquiries," says Flinders University environmental health lecturer Emma Kuhn.

"Our study of EHOs from around Australia found infrequent inquiries from the public, with only 6% of respondents receiving inquiries in the past month.

"Interestingly, many who sought information from other sources reported difficulty in finding trustworthy information in how to contact reliable testing and decontamination companies."

Flinders University researchers say a toolkit or framework could be used by the public, industry, police, EHOs and other people to provide a clear process and consistent information.

"With an estimated one in 10 clandestine laboratories discovered or detected by police, it's rare for a residence to be investigated because a resident needs to suspect contamination and take steps towards testing in order for a house to be investigated for previous meth use," says Ms Kuhn.

"Open communication between councils and [law enforcement](#) is essential and a standard approach or code of practice for industry involved in testing and decontamination is also important.

"Our research highlights the need for a national approach for EHOs and health protection departments to assist in managing methamphetamine contaminated properties.

"Our study also found the need for an approved list of contractors or companies for testing, remediation and occupational hygiene, with Western Australia currently the only state with a publicly available list."

The [health effects](#) on people, especially [young children](#) who spend a large part of their time in the home, is still unknown.

In a 2023 article in the [Journal of Environmental Health](#), Ms. Kuhn and colleagues call for more studies into the long-term effects on humans of third-hand exposure to methamphetamine (THEM) syndrome as part of further investigations into informing best standards of decontamination

practices and testing.

By contrast, more is known about first-hand user and second-hand exposure to people present during the manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants in a home or building.

More information: Emma J. Kuhn et al, An Investigation into the Prevalence of Methamphetamine Related Enquiries to Local Government Environmental Health Officers, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph21040455](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21040455)

Provided by Flinders University

Citation: Meth houses: Time for more testing? (2024, May 7) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-05-meth-houses.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.