

Substances At A Glance: Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine overdose can cause stroke or heart attack, even in young people.¹ If you suspect that you or someone you know has overdosed, contact emergency services immediately.



What is methamphetamine? Also known by its short form "meth" as well as other names including "speed" and "chalk," methamphetamine is an illegal and harmful drug that strongly affects certain parts of the brain. It is produced in illegal labs, combining toxic and flammable ingredients. Different chemicals and processes used from one meth lab to the next can cause different strengths, purity and effects of the product. Meth can be eaten, snorted, smoked or injected.



Meth use among youth: Meth use is not common among young people in Canada, as multiple national surveys between 2019-2022 report that less than 1% of Canadians age 15-24 report using methamphetamines.²



Why do youth use meth? Meth is used recreationally for the rush of energy and feelings of invincibility it can produce. Its ability to activate pleasure and reward centers of the brain cause feelings of intense excitement and euphoria, making it a potentially highly addictive substance.



Methamphetamines and the law: Methamphetamines are controlled under Schedule I of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Sale, possession or production of methamphetamines are illegal.¹ The laws regarding pharmaceutical methamphetamine are different in Canada than the United States. In the US, it has been approved for certain pharmaceutical uses, but this is not the case in Canada.



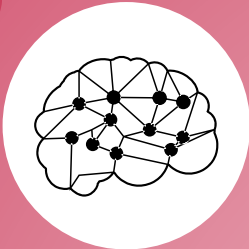
Meth Labs: Methamphetamines can be made illegally in homes, warehouses and car trunks, referred to as clandestine laboratories or "meth labs." These labs pose risks of fires and explosions due to using extremely flammable products, as well as air poisoning, contaminating soil or water supplies due to dumping toxic chemicals, and exposing communities to very strong, dangerous drugs.³ If you find or suspect you have found a meth lab, leave the area immediately, wash your face and hands and contact police.



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In 2022-2023, the Canadian Border Services Agency seized a record 6,300kg of illegal methamphetamine in a single seizure case worth an estimated \$1.5 billion.⁴



Short & Long-Term Effects: The effects of meth can be felt within seconds to minutes if inhaled or snorted or within a half hour if swallowed. Its effects last from 8 to 24 hours and range from high energy, rapid flowing ideas and rambling speech, elevated mood and increased libido to stomach ache, dilated pupils, irregular heartbeat, sleeplessness and hallucinations. The longer a person uses meth, the less euphoric effects they feel and the more unpleasant symptoms they report.¹



What are the risks of methamphetamine? Meth use can cause rotting teeth, anorexia, brain damage, severe skin and organ damage (including the kidneys, liver, heart and lungs). Mental health risks include issues with impulse control, memory, aggression and suicidal feelings, especially when a person is experiencing withdrawal. Psychotic symptoms, including erratic thoughts patterns, hallucinations or delusions can sometimes even persist for months or years after a person has stopped using methamphetamine.



How can someone reduce the risks of methamphetamine use? If someone uses meth, they should limit or avoid injection altogether. Anyone who chooses to inject should always use a clean, new needle without sharing, and dispose of all used needles safely. People who use meth should plan extended breaks from use and speak with their healthcare provider about safer alternative substances.



How can I help my kids understand the risks of meth? Parents need to talk with their kids about methamphetamine and the reality of what it does to the body. If you suspect a young person in your life is exposed to meth, or is already using meth, the time for conversation is now. If a young person in your life is using methamphetamine, learn more about the drug, and research the harm reduction and treatment services in your region.



The Good Samaritan Overdose Act: In Canada, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* offers some legal protection to anyone seeking emergency support at the scene of an overdose, including the person experiencing the overdose. The Act can protect from charges of possession of a controlled substance.

Reference List

1. Government of Canada, 2020. [Methamphetamine](#).
2. Government of Canada, 2020. [Canadian Alcohol and Drugs Survey 2019](#).
3. Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2022. [Clandestine Synthetic Drug Labs](#).
4. Canada Border Services Agency, 2023. [The CBSA makes four significant methamphetamine seizures in BC, including largest to date](#).