



Maternal and Child Health Fact Sheet

February 2007

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM METHAMPHETAMINE

This fact sheet describes the impact of meth on child health and provides examples of partnership opportunities for state health agencies to protect children from methamphetamine (meth). Meth is an addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system. Meth can be orally ingested, snorted, smoked, or injected. The effects can last from a few hours to a few days. Use often consists of meth binges followed by crashes. Clandestine labs, usually located in homes, produce meth easily using inexpensive, readily available ingredients.

Meth and Child Health

- Children in meth-using homes may be exposed to meth via second-hand smoke or accidental ingestion and have higher metabolic rates than adults, making them more vulnerable to the drug's effects.
- Children in meth-producing homes may ingest toxic chemicals, drugs, or contaminated foods, resulting in nausea, chest pain, tissue irritation, chemical burns, or death. They may also sustain injuries from fires or explosions.
- In 2003, children were present at ten percent of meth lab incidents.
- Children of substance abusers are three times more likely to be abused and four times more likely to be neglected than children of parents who are not substance abusers.
- The 2006 [Monitoring the Future](#) study found that 2.7 percent of eighth-, 3.2 percent of tenth-, and 4.4 percent of twelfth-graders reported using meth at some point in their lives.

State Partners

State Public Health Agency Partnership Opportunities

- **Environmental Health Programs** can assist in addressing exposures to the toxic substances among children found in meth labs as well as first responders and personnel who clean up labs. The [Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Environmental Health Unit](#) created guidelines for cleaning up meth labs and maintains a Clandestine Drug Laboratory Site List of known meth labs that have not yet been cleaned to meet state standards and therefore may pose health risks to potential renters or buyers.
- **Injury Prevention Programs** can help address intentional and unintentional injuries sustained by children from child abuse and neglect, fires, and explosions. They can also assist in preventing injuries among first responders and personnel who clean up meth labs. The [Oklahoma Department of Health Injury Prevention Service](#) published surveillance data and case studies on meth-lab related injuries in Oklahoma's [Injury Update](#). They also listed warning signs to help citizens identify illegal meth labs.
- **Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Programs** can ensure that children found in meth-using or producing homes have access to needed health and social services. MCH programs can also contribute to education and prevention campaigns, especially those intended for teens and pregnant women. The [Wyoming Department of Health](#) noted the importance of addressing meth in its Title V MCH Block Grant Needs assessment and set a state performance measure on the percent of high school students using methamphetamine in the past 30 days (2010 goal=four percent). They also launched a [media campaign](#) in fall 2006.

Inter-agency Partnership Opportunities

- **Assuring Treatment:** Public health agencies can provide safety-net services to individuals receiving treatment and long-term recovery services for meth abuse from substance abuse agencies.

Health Effects of Meth

- Increased heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, and breathing rate, decreased appetite.
- Malnutrition, weight-loss and anorexia, dental problems.
- Increased risk for HIV, STIs.
- Convulsions, hyperthermia, stroke, death.

Mental Health Effects of Meth

- Irritability, insomnia, confusion, anxiety, paranoia, hallucinations, violent behavior.
- Long-term damage to areas of the brain that control memory, motor coordination cognitive abilities.

- **Preventing Meth Use:** Public health agencies can work with education, justice, substance abuse, and/or other relevant agencies to inform prevention efforts around meth. These range from small, informal collaborations to formal multi-agency partnerships, such as the [Tennessee Governor’s Task Force on Methamphetamine Abuse](#).
- **Addressing Child Welfare Issues:** Public health agencies can work with child welfare (e.g., social or human services) agencies to ensure that children found in meth-using/producing homes receive appropriate physical, developmental, and psychological assessments and referrals to needed services.
- **Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Programs:** Over 25 states operate [DEC programs](#), which are formalized multi-agency efforts that ensure children found in homes or environments that produce meth and/or other illegal substances receive appropriate attention and care. DEC Programs coordinate the efforts of law enforcement, medical services, and child welfare workers.

DEC Team Members
 First Responders
 Child Protective Services
 Law Enforcement
 Health Professionals
 Mental Health Professionals
 Attorneys
 Child Advocates
 Substance Abuse Treatment Providers
 Community Leaders
 General Public

Legislative Partnership Opportunities

Several states passed legislation that protects children from meth, including laws that:

- Regulate over-the-counter medications and substances that are necessary ingredients for producing the drug. These laws may limit the amount of drug or substance a customer may purchase in a given period of time or limit access (e.g., by dispensing the substance only at pharmacies).
- Address child protection issues raised by illegal manufacture of methamphetamine through provisions such as additional penalties (or sentencing enhancements) in meth manufacturing cases where children are present and adding “drug manufacturing” to various child welfare laws.
- Establish task forces comprised of multiple state agencies to address children’s issues related to meth.
- Appropriate funds for treatment, prevention, rehabilitation and education related to methamphetamine and/or for clean-up of clandestine meth labs.

Other Partners

- **Local Government:** Local health, justice, and social service departments and providers are the first on the scene of a newly discovered meth lab. Thus, they play important roles in identifying and removing children from meth-using/producing homes. They may also track incidence of meth exposure among women and children and resulting health outcomes.
- **The Federal Government:** The White House Office on Drug Control Policy, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Justice are actively involved in the fight against meth. They maintain a [Web site](#) that indexes federal, state, and local meth legislation, resources, programs, and available funding.
- **Private partners:** Foundations, advocacy organizations, universities, community- and, or faith-based organizations, and other non-profits often play roles in protecting children from meth. Private entities from small local businesses to large corporations also engage in meth issues.

Resources

- ASTHO Meth Web site: www.astho.org/?template=methamphetamine.html.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: www.drugabuse.gov/DrugPages/Methamphetamine.html.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: www.samhsa.gov.
- National Center on Drug Abuse and Child Welfare: www.ncsacw.samhsa.gov/MethamphetamineList.htm.
- National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors: www.nasasad.org.

This fact sheet was supported by project 1G96MC04445-01-00 from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services. ASTHO is grateful for this support.