

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Highlights from CEWG December 2002 Advance Report: High Purity, Low Cost Heroin Associated with Increase in Heroin-Related Deaths; Ecstasy Use Spreading from Raves and Night Clubs

The Community Epidemiology Work Group (CEWG) is a NIDA- sponsored network of epidemiologists and researchers that meets twice a year to discuss current and emerging substance abuse problems. Representatives from 21 U.S. areas and 7 countries outside the U.S. attended the 53rd meeting held in Miami, Florida this past December. Information gathered from the meeting demonstrate the similarities and differences in substance abuse patterns in the CEWG areas and enable the tracking of emerging trends. Following are highlights from the meeting.

- **Cocaine** and **crack** indicators continued a pattern of stabilization or decline, with the only increase seen in San Francisco. While in most areas crack was the preferred form of cocaine, powder cocaine remained widely available in many CEWG areas, including Denver, Detroit, Phoenix, St. Louis, and Texas.
- **Heroin** abuse indicators remained high despite mixed patterns of abuse. In Washington D.C., “heroin has surpassed crack as the drug associated with the most serious consequences: medically, legally, and in overall effects to society” (p. 12). In Baltimore, heroin was the responsible for 50% of drug-related treatment admissions in 2000. Increases in heroin-related deaths were reported in 6 CEWG areas.
- Indicators of **methamphetamine** use continued to be highest in Hawaii, where purity is nearly 100 percent, and in west coast and Southwest areas. There was evidence that methamphetamine was increasingly being used by certain populations in other areas of the U.S. In New York City, methamphetamine abuse is “especially on the rise among males in gay communities” (p. 32).
- While the use of **MDMA** (ecstasy) increased in only Atlanta and Texas, most areas reported that “the use of this drug had spread beyond the rave and nightclub venue, to different ethnic groups, high school and college students, and gay populations” (p. 39).

NOTE: The 21 U.S. CEWG areas reporting at this meeting were Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Newark, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, St. Louis, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Texas, Washington D.C.

SOURCE: National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Community Epidemiology Work Group, “Epidemiologic Trends in Drug Abuse Advance Report, December 2002,” April 2003. Available online (<http://www.drugabuse.gov/about/organization/cewg/Reports.html>).

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