

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

National Methamphetamine Epidemic?

“...smokable methamphetamine will be the drug plague of the 1990's”

(New York Times, September 16, 1989)

“...meth could become the biggest scourge of American drug enforcement since the cocaine epidemic.”

(Christian Science Monitor, October 27, 1995)

“...the drug [methamphetamine] could become ‘the crack of the 21st century’.”

(The Oregonian, December 31, 2004)

While methamphetamine use has gradually spread eastward during the past decade, the majority of methamphetamine use and production remains west of the Mississippi River. Many communities in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the country have yet to experience the degree of methamphetamine problems seen in other areas, suggesting that at present the problem should not be portrayed as a national epidemic. Rather, it appears to be concentrated and growing in rural communities. Yet speculation that “meth use is exploding in cities and suburbs all across America”¹ periodically reemerges.² Media coverage of this “national” methamphetamine problem prompted a recent CESAR analysis of methamphetamine use in Maryland. Following is a summary of the major findings of the report, *Methamphetamine in Maryland*, which will be available this week at <http://www.cesar.umd.edu>.

- Methamphetamine ranked last among nine illicit drugs most commonly used by Maryland students. Less than 5% of 10th and 12th grade students reported ever using methamphetamine in 2002, compared to 36% for marijuana, 11% for other stimulants, and 10% for hallucinogens.
- Less than 0.5% of all treatment admissions in Maryland in FY2004 were methamphetamine related.
- In the Baltimore and Washington, D.C., metropolitan statistical areas combined there were 39 methamphetamine-related emergency department visits in 2002, compared to 9,002 for cocaine and 6,312 for heroin. There was one methamphetamine-caused death in Maryland in 2004.
- According to the National Clandestine Laboratory Database, one methamphetamine lab was found in Maryland in 2004, compared to 474 in California and 1,049 in Missouri.³
- Small pockets of use do exist among certain populations and regions of the state. As elsewhere in the country, methamphetamine users in Maryland are most likely to be white males of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds living in rural areas.
- While available data do not indicate that methamphetamine is a prevalent drug of abuse in Maryland, the growing number of methamphetamine labs and use reported in neighboring states, such as Virginia, suggest that indicators of methamphetamine use in Maryland should continue to be monitored.

¹The Today Show, “Methamphetamine abuse on rise with suburban women” March 2, 2005.

²For a discussion on how a previous localized methamphetamine problem came to be projected on a national level, see Jenkins, Philip. “‘The Ice Age’ The Social Construction of a Drug Panic,” *Justice Quarterly* (11)1:7-31, 1994.

³These figures may underestimate the actual number of methamphetamine labs seized in each state because law enforcement agencies are not required to report lab seizures to the National Clandestine Laboratory Database.

SOURCE: Center for Substance Abuse Research, “Methamphetamine in Maryland,” *CESAR Briefing*, March 2005. For more information, contact Eric Wish at 301-405-9774 or ewish@cesar.umd.edu.

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