

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***Leading Doctors, Scientists, and Researchers Request that
Media and Policymakers Stop Perpetuating “Meth Baby” Myths***

On July 27, 2005, more than 90 leading medical doctors, scientists, psychological researchers, and treatment specialists released an open letter requesting that “policies addressing prenatal exposure to methamphetamines and media coverage of this issue be based on science, not presumption or prejudice.” Following are some of the highlights of the letter.

- The terms “ice babies” and “meth babies” lack medical and scientific validity and should not be used.
- “Although research on the medical and developmental effects of prenatal methamphetamine exposure is still in its early stages, our experience with almost 20 years of research on the chemically related drug, cocaine, has not identified a recognizable condition, syndrome or disorder that should be termed ‘crack baby’ nor found the degree of harm reported in the media and then used to justify numerous punitive legislative proposals.”
- Previous research with similar labels applied to children exposed parentally to cocaine have found that these labels “harm the children to which they are applied, lowering expectations for their academic and life achievements, discouraging investigation into other causes for physical and social problems the child might encounter, and leading to policies that ignore factors, including poverty, that may play a much more significant role in their lives.”
- There is no such thing as a “meth-addicted baby.” Addiction is defined as “compulsive behavior that continues in spite of adverse consequences.” Thus, by definition, babies cannot be “addicted” to methamphetamines or anything else.
- While physiologic dependence (not addiction) has been documented among infants exposed in utero to opiates, no such dependence symptoms have been found following prenatal cocaine or methamphetamine exposure.
- Media and policymakers too often “rely on people who lack any scientific experience or expertise for their information about the effects of prenatal exposure to methamphetamine and about the efficacy of treatment.”

A copy of the letter, including a listing of the professionals signing the letter, is available online at http://www.jointogether.org/sa/files/pdf/Meth_Letter.pdf. For more information, contact Dr. David C. Lewis at 401-444-1818 or David_Lewis@brown.edu.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Join Together, “Open Letter,” July 27, 2005. Available online (http://www.jointogether.org/sa/files/pdf/Meth_Letter.pdf). Accessed 8/10/05.

Compilation of CESAR Methamphetamine Publications Now Available

A compilation of selected CESAR methamphetamine publications from 1996 to 2005 is available on our website at <http://www.cesar.umd.edu>. The packet can also be emailed to you by contacting CESAR at cesar@cesar.umd.edu.