

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Winter 1997 Pulse Check: Crack Stable, Heroin Increasing

Twice each year the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) conducts interviews with drug ethnographers and epidemiologists, law enforcement officers, and substance abuse treatment providers to obtain impressionistic information about national drug abuse trends as they develop. The most recent interviews, conducted last December, were recently released in the Winter 1997 *Pulse Check* report. Following are among the highlights of that report:

- While cocaine continues to be the most prevalent drug of abuse nationwide, the market for **crack cocaine** appears to have stabilized in most areas. Few younger, new drug users are attracted to crack, which has “developed the image of a ‘junkie’ or ‘burnout’ drug” and in some areas is not as easily accessible as other drugs.
- In contrast to the declining image of crack, **heroin** is an increasingly attractive drug to users. Its low cost, ease of administration (higher purity allows the drug to be snorted rather than injected), and aggressive marketing have resulted in an increase in heroin use and availability in all the Pulse Check regions. However, while many young users are experimenting with heroin, the majority of heroin users continue to be older, long-term users who inject the drug.
- The majority of **marijuana** users continue to be teenagers and young adults. Nearly all law enforcement sources reported an increase in marijuana use. In fact, “police sources in Washington, D.C. report that use has risen so drastically that the regional U.S. Attorney has asked for an increase in penalties for marijuana trafficking.”
- Among the emerging drugs identified by sources were **methamphetamine** (Atlanta, Austin, Denver, suburban Maryland, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.), **hallucinogens** and other club drugs (Baltimore, Cleveland, suburban Maryland, Miami, New York, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.), **inhalants** (suburban Maryland, San Antonio/El Paso, and Washington, D.C.), and illicitly used **prescription drugs** (Austin, Baltimore, Miami, and San Antonio/El Paso).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *Pulse Check: National Trends in Drug Abuse*, Winter 1997 (WWW document; URL <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/pulsechk/winter97/pcindex.html>; downloaded 4/1/98). To obtain a complimentary copy of this report, contact ONDCP's Drugs and Crime Clearinghouse at 800-666-3332.