



Methamphetamines

By: Mariah Coulstring

In recent years both locally and nationally, the Opioid Crisis has rightfully captured our attention and resources. However, in the background, Methamphetamine (Meth) has also been on the rise. Every drug of abuse is harmful in its own right, but Meth seems to be a drug that leaves a greater path of destruction. Not only does the user experience

neglect to themselves, manufacturing meth is harmful to the environment and anyone close to the making of the product. Growing in the shadows, the Meth epidemic also deserves our community's awareness with the goal of this article being to educate and to help us to understand the issue at hand that methamphetamine is bringing to our small communities.

Through conversations with the Haverhill Area Substance Misuse Prevention Coalition (HASMPC) members who represent local law enforcement and criminal justice, Meth is uniquely pervasive and destructive in our small, rural communities just as it is in many areas across the country. The drug impacts every part of the user's body including the mind and can impact just about every other part of a person's life from family and friends to jobs. Damage to the brain caused by Meth use, such as plummeted dopamine levels after the individual no longer uses (a chemical in the brain), has lasting effects and takes a long time to recover. What's more, for Meth users who have become addicted or dependent, there is currently no approved medication to treat individuals who suffer from Methamphetamine use disorder.

Methamphetamine, generally known as Meth but also referred to as "Tina", "Crystal" or "Ice", is classified as a stimulant and is either inhaled, snorted, smoked, or injected. Once the user is intoxicated, they experience feelings of mania, deranged thinking, hypersexuality and become hyper-focused. Contrary to popular belief, an individual can experience a Meth overdose. A Meth overdose is characterized by symptoms such as hyperthermia, psychosis, rapid heart rate that could result in heart attack, kidney damage, and violent twitches and jerks. Poly substance use, or using more than just one drug when getting high, is the norm for the majority of Meth users, not just the exception. This poly-use culture around Meth contributes to overdose deaths as well, considering the majority of deaths involving stimulants also involved opioids and/or alcohol.

Individuals who use Meth are also at an increased risk for HIV, not only because of sharing needles, but also because of the sexual culture and behaviors associated with using Meth (a common side effect is an increase in libido). Crystal Meth is a commonly used substance in instances where men engage in sexual intercourse with other men and is called "ChemSex" in Methamphetamine culture, particularly referring to using these substances as a part of a homosexual sex life experience.

Psychosis, which is generally referred to as losing touch with reality, is usually brought on by a severe mental or health condition, drug use, trauma or stress and produces effects that has the individual seeing, hearing or believing things that are not real. Individuals who are heavy users of Methamphetamine could experience psychosis from use of the drug, along with hours of sleep deprivation, and can mimic some of the behaviors you would see in someone struggling with schizophrenia. One of the hallmark symptoms associated with this psychosis is

“Persecutory Delusions”, when the individual is out of touch with reality and feels paranoid that they are at risk of being harmed by someone. Heavy users can also experience hallucinations, with the majority reporting seeing shadows as the primary visual hallucination, another hallmark associated with this psychosis. Users who are experiencing this level of psychosis are a danger to themselves and others around them that are trying to care for them. The best way to interact with someone who is actively experiencing these symptoms is to talk simply and concretely, try to establish their trust by ensuring they are safe, but always be aware of your own safety before approaching someone who is in this state. One way to assist safely is to start by talking at a safe distance. Keep in mind that the individual is more than likely going to be paranoid that you are also out to get them, so avoid standing over or cornering the person. Simple actions like taking out your cell phone could be a trigger because, in their mind, you could be calling “them”.

As was mentioned in the beginning of this article, not only is Meth dangerous to the user, but the process of manufacturing meth is extremely harmful to the environment and anyone present while the process is taking place. In some cases, the highly volatile (unstable and explosive) substances that are used to create Meth include fertilizers, ammonia and lithium batteries, which can explode when exposed to oxygen. The Meth cooking process can cause an entire home to burst into flames. One of the most popular methamphetamine manufacturing processes that we see is called the “one-pot” method or a “one-pot meth lab”. This is done by combining the ingredients to make meth in a plastic soda bottle to serve as a make-shift “lab”. This process usually takes place within a moving vehicle, garages, out buildings, or even in the woods, but is usually placed on the side of the road or in other safe keeping spots to “cook” during the day while the user moves carefully away from their “one-pot”. Later in the day, the individual creating the substance will come back and retrieve the bottle and go through the next steps of turning that raw material into powdered Meth. These deadly chemicals are under a lot of pressure in the bottle and one wrong move could result in chemical burns as well as a massive explosion with life-threatening potential. Authorities recommend that if you come in contact with a plastic bottle with an unknown substance inside or with a tube coming from the bottle, get away from the area as quickly as possible and do not touch the bottle at all, not even to poke with a stick, this could cause the chemicals to react and catch fire. Even if the bottle doesn’t turn out to be a “one-pot”, call 911 and have the professionals address it, in the meantime, try your best to secure the area so that no one disturbs it while law enforcement are on their way.

Speaking to the topic of meth use disorder in the community, Grafton County Attorney, Marcie Hornick said,

“It is no surprise to anyone that the global onslaught of the coronavirus has had impacts on all of us; for some, those impacts have arrived literally in our own backyards. Because the ability to utilize the usual methods of shipping items (including drugs) to US soil was interrupted so severely by the far reach of the pandemic, those beset by substance use disorder have had to turn to other ways to feed their addiction: one pot meth “labs” have sprung up in many small communities that never ever expected to see something as rapacious and insidious in their home towns. The false narrative created by the “popularization” of drugs like meth on certain tv shows has also unfortunately seduced way too many young people.”

In our office, we see not only those who commit crimes to further fuel their substance misuse disorders, but others who simply find themselves in places they never dreamed of being. Our alternative sentencing programs are geared toward providing effective and meaningful alternative to the traditional criminal justice system for first time juvenile offenders and for individuals with a mental illness, or drug and alcohol addiction. Our goal is to promote prompt intervention, education, treatment and recovery in order to improve the quality of the individual's life, reduce recidivism and improve community safety. But the criminal justice system isn't able to handle it all. Some people find themselves behind bars when they should be in treatment- and unfortunately, as the travel/shipping restrictions are relaxing, we are seeing an uptick in overdoses.

We have to remember however, that as a community, we can all help our neighbors and each other further the understanding that there is always someplace to turn for help.”

If you or someone you know is struggling with methamphetamines (Meth) or other substance and to learn more, check out these resources:

- Want to talk to a live person? Call AskPETRA (Prevention, Education, Treatment, Recovery Assistance) at 603-259-1729, Monday thru Friday, 8am-4:30pm to be connected with Northern NH professionals who will help to provide local resources.
- Need treatment? Call 211 to be connected to the closest Doorway near you

Youth on Track is a column dedicated to youth substance misuse prevention and education in our community and is brought to you by the Haverhill Area Substance Misuse Prevention Coalition (HASMPC). Mariah Coulstring is the Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Program Coordinator for HASMPC and employee of the North Country Health Consortium (NCHC) in Littleton, NH, the hub of the regional public health network that also serves as the fiscal agent for HASMPC.

Please visit us on Facebook by searching @HASMPC and contact me with questions, comments, or suggestions for topics at: mcoulstring@nchcnh.org or call (603) 259-3700 X251.