

Crystal methamphetamine use, routes of administration and use of commercial ball pipes among people who inject drugs in Australia

Antonia Karlsson, Nadine Ezard, Caroline Salom, Paul Dietze, Simon Lenton, Raimondo Bruno, Louisa Degenhardt & Amy Peacock

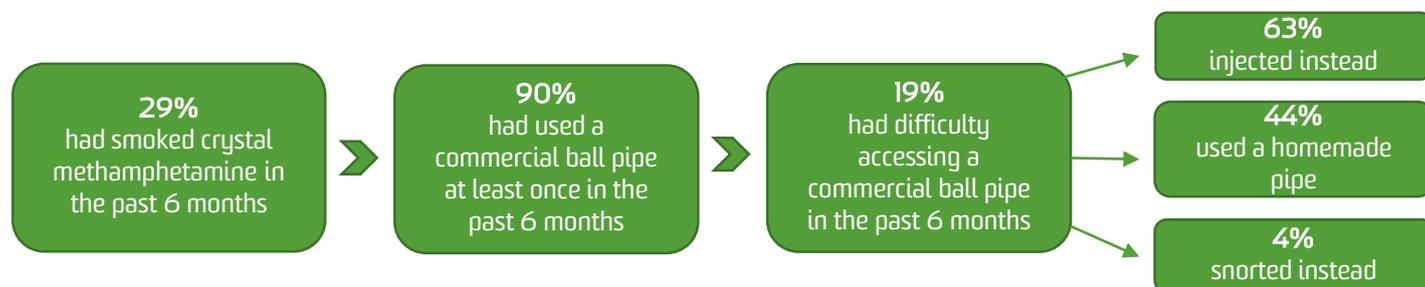
The issue

- Increases in crystal methamphetamine use have been associated with a rise in methamphetamine-related harms when taken by injecting or smoking^[1].
- It is an offence in most parts of Australia to possess any implement for using methamphetamine (e.g. a pipe) other than a needle and syringe^[2].
- Research has revealed that smoking is an increasingly favoured route of administration^[3], but information about smoking practices and equipment use is lacking.
- The use of homemade pipes can result in various harms including cuts, burns, blisters and open sores inside the mouth of those who smoke crystal methamphetamine^[4].

What our work found

We conducted interviews with people who regularly inject drugs (IDRS; N=902) recruited from Australian capital cities in May-July 2019 for the [Illicit Drug Reporting System \(IDRS\)](#).

- Three in four participants (76%) had used crystal methamphetamine in the past 6 months.
- Over one-quarter (29%) had smoked crystal methamphetamine in the past 6 months.
- Most IDRS participants who had smoked crystal methamphetamine had used a ball pipe (90%).
- One in five (19%) participants who smoked crystal methamphetamine had difficulties obtaining a commercial ball pipe in the past 6 months.
- Three in five (63%) of those who had difficulties accessing a pipe had injected instead, and more than two in five (44%) had used a homemade pipe (e.g., foil, lightbulb).



Implications

- Difficulties accessing commercial ball pipes led to greater frequency of injection and use of homemade pipes among this sample.
- Legislative changes banning commercial ball pipes also create a barrier to provision of safer smoking equipment and for health education for those who smoke crystal methamphetamine.
- Safe smoking kits have been used in other countries as a way of engaging this population^[4], and may be a way of facilitating safer smoking and greater health service engagement in Australia.

References

1. McKetin, R. et al. (2008). Characteristics and harms associated with injecting versus smoking methamphetamine among methamphetamine entrants. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 27, 277-85.
2. Hughes, C. (2014). *Drugs and the law: What you need to know*. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre: UNSW.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016: Detailed findings. Canberra: AIHW.
4. Strike, C., & Watson, T.M. (2017). Education and equipment for people who smoke crack cocaine in Canada. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 14, 17.

Suggested citation: Karlsson, A., Ezard, N., Salom, C., Dietze, P., Lenton, S., Bruno, R., Degenhardt, L., & Peacock, A. (2019). Crystal methamphetamine use, routes of administration and use of commercial ball pipes among people who inject drugs in Australia. *Drug Trends Bulletin Series*. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney. <http://doi.org/10.26190/5da50dc646bbd>

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the Drug and Alcohol Program ©NDARC, UNSW SYDNEY 2019. This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. All other rights are reserved. Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the information manager, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia.