

EMBARGOED NOT FOR RELEASE PRIOR TO 12.05 AM WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 14 2015

Crystal methamphetamine use increases by six per cent among people who inject drugs but remains stable among regular psychostimulant users

- 67 per cent of people who inject drugs (PWID) used crystal methamphetamine in 2015 compared with 19 per cent of regular psychostimulant users (RPU)
- Use of all types of methamphetamine remained stable among PWID but dropped by 10 per cent in RPU
- Frequency of heroin use increased among PWID to an average of every second day
- Prevalence and frequency of cannabis use increased significantly among RPU

October 14 2015

Crystal methamphetamine use among people who inject drugs (PWID) increased by a further six per cent in 2015, with more than two thirds of the sample reporting regular use of the drug, the National Drug Trends Conference will hear today. But use of crystal methamphetamine, has remained stable among regular psychostimulant users (RPU), who represent a different sample of the drug using population.

The Conference organised by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) will report on the findings of its two annual national surveys of nearly 2,000 people. One survey is with people who inject drugs regularly and the other is people who use psychostimulants regularly.

In 2015 over two thirds (67 per cent) of the PWID interviewed for the Centre's Annual Illicit Drugs Reporting System (IDRS) reported regularly using crystal methamphetamine in the previous six months, an average of once a week, up from 61 per cent in 2014. In comparison in 2010 only 39 per cent of users reported using crystal methamphetamine. PWID represent a particularly high-risk population who are often unemployed, have spent time in prison, and have complex mental health and substance use problems across a range of drugs including heroin.

The proportion of PWID using crystal methamphetamine has exceeded its previous peak of 56% in 2006, the last time there was a major issue with the drug in Australia.

Users reported that the drug was easy or very easy to obtain and that purity was high.

In contrast to the PWID, use of any methamphetamine among the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) participants saw a significant decline of just under 10 per

cent over the period, with 38 per cent reporting use of any methamphetamine compared with 47 per cent in 2014 and 19 per cent reporting use of crystal methamphetamine in the previous six months, which is similar to 2014 figure (20%). Use of speed power, the most popular form of methamphetamine in this group, declined significantly to 25 per cent of participants compared with 36 per cent in 2014. This RPU cohort has a very different profile to the PWID – they are more likely to be employed, younger, university educated and unlikely to have a prison history.

The drug monitoring programs at NDARC, which have now been in operation for 15 years provide vital information about trends in drug use in Australia, said Professor Michael Farrell, Director of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

“All the data we have indicates a strong upward trend in problems related to crystal methamphetamine,” said Professor Michael Farrell.

“But our surveys are indicating that the use of different forms of methamphetamine is quite different among the two populations interviewed. We still need more information on other drug using populations, particularly in regional and rural areas.

“The picture emerging from the Drug Trends program regarding methamphetamine use is that problematic use appears to be prevalent among high risk groups of users. While strategies targeting prevention among the general population remain important, messages targeting high risk groups in particular, including messages about the harms related to methamphetamine use and available treatment options, are crucial,” said Professor Farrell.

The conference will also hear that harms related to methamphetamine use have increased:

- The rate of hospital presentations for amphetamine related problems have almost doubled since 2001 from 145 per million people to 272 per million people in 2013.
- Treatment for amphetamine related problems have doubled from 10,027 in 2009 to 22,265 in 2013
- Methamphetamine related deaths have increased from 3.4 per million persons in 2001 to 8.1 per million persons in 2011

Other key findings from the 2015 EDRS and IDRS reports

ILLICIT DRUGS REPORTING SYSTEM

- Total number surveyed : 888
- Injected in the previous six months
- Average Age: 42
- 67 per cent males
- 83 per cent unemployed

- 58 per cent single
- 55 per cent prison history
- Average age first injected:20

Any form of methamphetamine use in PWID by state

- Use was highest at 81per cent in ACT
- Use was lowest in NSW falling to 66 per cent from 75 per cent in 2014
- Northern Territory reported the biggest jump in use from 37 per cent to 67 per cent

Drug related harms among PWID who used crystal methamphetamine

Compared to PWID who did not recently use crystal, more of those who used crystal reported;

- harmful behaviours such as sharing equipment and injection problems
- mental health problems and severe psychological distress
- criminal involvement and recent arrest

Heroin

- Most commonly reported drug of choice among PWID.
- The proportion using heroin was stable but there has been a significant increase in the number of days used in 2015. Nationally users were using on average every second day. Days of use were highest in NSW with users reporting using 120 out of 180 days.
- The price per gram nationally has dropped marginally to an average of \$300 a gram
- Cost was highest in WA at \$600 per gram followed by NSW at \$400 a gram. It was cheapest in Victoria at \$250 a gram

Extra medical use and injection of pharmaceuticals

- Nationally, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion reporting use of morphine and oxycodone.
- Decrease in 'illicit' (not prescribed) injection of morphine oxycodone
- Morphine injection - decrease in all states but ACT and QLD
- Oxycodone injection – decrease in all states but ACT, SA and NT
- Cannabis also common among PWID although few nominate as drug of choice

ECSTASY AND RELATED DRUG REPORTING SYSTEM (EDRS)

- Total number surveyed: 763
- 62 per cent single
- 12 per cent unemployed
- 46 per cent tertiary educated
- Average age: 23
- 1 per cent of participants had used ecstasy at least monthly in previous six months

Polydrug use

- Use of cannabis increased significantly among RPU with 87 per cent of the sample having used it in the past six months and 29 per cent reporting it as their drug of choice
- Days of use of cannabis also increased with the sample using cannabis around twice weekly
- Use of tobacco also increased significantly with 82 per cent reporting recent use compared with 77 per cent in 2014
- 97 per cent of the sample reported using alcohol on average drinking twice weekly with five per cent drinking daily
- 79 per cent of the sample were drinking at hazardous levels

New psychoactive substances

- Use of new psychoactive substances (NPS) among RPU has remained stable with around 40 per cent of the sample reporting use in the last six months. Use remained very infrequent – one or two days over the six month period.
- NPS however is growing as a class globally with 450 different types of substances being identified across the globe
- The decline in use of synthetic cannabis first reported in 2014 has remained with use now stable at 6 per cent of the sample reporting use. Certain classes of NPS have increased in use such as phenethylamines (eg NBOMe), tryptamines (eg DMT) and plant based substances such as Salvia and Datura)
- Other classes such as synthetic cathinones (eg mephedrone) and piperazines (BZP) have decreased in use. For more information on NPS and their effects see the [NDARC fact sheet](#).

Online purchase of drugs and the Dark Web

- Prevalence of people buying drugs online remains low with 10 per cent having purchased a drug online in the previous 12 months and 14 per cent in their lifetime
- However 69 per cent had friends who had purchased online
- Ecstasy, LSD and cannabis were the most common drugs purchased online.
- For new psychoactive substances the most commonly purchased substances were 2C-X family; DMT and NBOMe.

Drug related harms

- 19 per cent of the sample reported recently overdosing on a stimulant and 29 per cent had overdosed in their lifetime. Of these ecstasy was by far the most common stimulant drug associated with overdose
- 18 per cent reported overdose on a central nervous system depressant with alcohol involved in over 80 per cent of these overdoses

IDRS findings: Stafford, J. & Burns, L. (2015) Australian Drug Trends 2015: Findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS). Australian Drug Trends Conference, Sydney. National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Stafford J, Breen C & Burns L. (2015). Key Findings from the 2015 IDRS: a survey of people who inject drugs. IDRS Drug Trends Bulletin, October 2015. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales

EDRS findings: Sindicich, N. & Burns, L. (2015) Australian Drug Trends 2015: Findings from the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS). Australian Drug Trends Conference, Sydney. National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Sindicich N, Breen C & Burns L. (2015). An overview of the 2015, October 2015 Findings from the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System. EDRS Drug Trends Bulletin, October 2015. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales

Media contact:
Marion Downey

Communications Manager, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
P: (02) 9385 0180 | 0401 713 850 | m.downey@unsw.edu.au