

EMBARGO: NOT FOR PUBLICATION PRIOR TO 12.01AM MONDAY 20 OCTOBER 2014

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Ice use increases among people who inject drugs

- Overall use of methamphetamine has stabilised, but ice use has increased among people who inject drugs
- 61 per cent of people who regularly inject drugs reported using ice in the previous six months – an increase from 52 per cent 10 years ago
- The biggest increase in ice use was reported in Victoria and the ACT, with use in those states now equal to the level of ice use in NSW
- Frequency of ice use among the national sample increased from fortnightly to close to weekly
- In the ACT those who use ice report taking it twice a week; in NSW more than once a week, and in Victoria fortnightly
- Non injecting drug users such as ecstasy users who take drugs at clubs and parties have NOT increased their use of ice

The use of crystal methamphetamine ('ice') among people who inject drugs has increased significantly over the past year according to research to be released by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at a conference in Sydney today (October 20).

The Centre's annual survey of people who inject drugs, the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS), found 61 per cent of the 898 users surveyed in 2014 had used ice in the last six months, up from 55 per cent in 2013

Increases were biggest in Victoria, where 75 per cent of users reported using ice in the last six months, compared with 55 per cent in 2013. In the ACT, 72 per cent of users reported ice use, up nine per cent on 2013. Use of ice among injectors in NSW remained high at 74 per cent – the same level as reported in 2013.

Nationally, users reported a median of 20 days of ice use in the last six months, up from 12 days in 2013. Users in the ACT reported a median of 48 days of ice use in the last six months, while NSW and Victorian users reported 28 and 12 days respectively.

Chief investigator of the study, UNSW Associate Professor Lucy Burns, said the reported increase in the use of crystal methamphetamine among people who inject drugs was significant.

“This is a cause for concern as ice is metabolised by the body more quickly than other forms of methamphetamine, is more addictive and its use is associated with drug induced psychosis, violence and erratic behaviour.

“Injecting ice also puts people at a number of other major risks, including acquiring septicaemia, Hepatitis C and HIV.”

Dr Lucy Burns said the trend observed in the survey of injecting drug users was reflective of trends observed in the general population and law enforcement data.

The Australian Government’s 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) found that while levels of methamphetamine use in the general population had not changed since 2010, there had been a marked shift to ice as the preferred form of methamphetamine. Of the 2.1 per cent of the general population who reported recent methamphetamine use in 2013, over 50 per cent had used it in crystal form, up from 21.7 per cent in 2010.

Law enforcement data confirms this trend, with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Services reporting a big increase in the number of border detections of ice, up from 171 in 2012 to 1084 in 2013. Weight of seizures increased from 160.2kg to 1,456 kg. Hospitalisations for amphetamine related problems are the highest since 1993 with 2,895 treatment episodes occurring in 2012. The number of 10 to 19 year olds receiving treatment for amphetamine related problems is the highest on record, according to data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Dr Burns said the use of ice among people who inject drugs was quite different to that seen among ecstasy and related drugs users, who are also surveyed annually by NDARC via the Ecstasy and related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS). Unlike people who inject drugs, regular ecstasy users tend to be younger, more likely to be employed and more likely to take drugs in clubs, private parties and music venues.

“A fifth of regular ecstasy users we surveyed in 2014 reported recent use of ice,” Dr Burns said. “Although the number reporting recent ice use has increased since 2010, this particular group is more likely to use ‘speed’, or methamphetamine in powder form.”

Dr Burns said the data from the two national surveys of drug users served as an early warning system of changes in drug trends.

“We need to pay constant attention to the trends in use of drugs so health and treatment services have the most up to date information possible to help them plan effective services,” Dr Burns said.

The 2014 findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) and the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) will be presented at the National Drug Trends Conference at the Australian Maritime Museum in Sydney today (October 20).

- Ends -

For the conference program and more detailed findings from each state and territory, please see the attachment 2014 Drug Trends Conference Handout.

What: 2014 National Drugs Trends Conference

When: Monday 20 October 2014, 8.45 am – 5.00pm

Where: Australian National Maritime Museum Sydney

Media contacts:

Marion Downey

Communications Manager, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre

P: (02) 9385 0180 / 0401 713 850 / m.downey@unsw.edu.au

Erin O'Loughlin

Communications Officer, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre

P: (02) 9385 0124 / 0402 870 996 / erin.oloughlin@unsw.edu.au

<https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/group/drug-trends>

APPENDIX: Key findings from the 2014 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)

Eight hundred and ninety-eight participants were recruited for the 2014 IDRS.

- Heroin remained the most commonly reported drug of choice for participants who injected drugs (53% in 2013 and 50% in 2014).
- The frequency of use of 'any form' of methamphetamine remained stable (66% in 2013 and 70% in 2014).
 - By form, the recent use of speed powder (34% in 2013 and 30% in 2014) and base (13% in 2013 and 12% in 2014) remained stable, while the recent use of ice/crystal significantly increased (55% in 2013 and 61% in 2014). The availability of all forms was reported as 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain.
 - Nationally, the frequency of use of any form of methamphetamine remained stable at 24 days; however the frequency of ice use significantly increased (12 days in 2013 (approximately fortnightly) to 20 days in 2014 (almost weekly)).
- Whilst cannabis use remained common, the frequency of use in the past six months significantly decreased from 170 days in 2013 to 96 days in 2014.
- Morphine remained the most commonly injected pharmaceutical opioid (35% in 2013 and 2014). There were jurisdictional differences; reports of this behaviour remained highest in the NT (84%) and TAS (71%), jurisdictions where heroin has traditionally been the least available.
- Recent injection of oxycodone appeared stable (31% in 2013 and 28% in 2014). Frequency of illicit use, as with all extra-medical use of opioid medication, remained sporadic.

About the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)

The IDRS is a national illicit drug monitoring system intended to serve as a strategic early warning system, identifying emerging trends of local and national concern in illicit drug markets. The IDRS consists of three components: interviews with people who inject drugs (PWID) regularly; interviews with key experts, who are professionals who have knowledge of drug trends and/or regular contact with users through their work; and analysis and examination of indicator data sources related to illicit drugs.

The IDRS monitors the price, purity, availability and patterns of use of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. The IDRS is designed to be sensitive to trends, providing data in a timely manner, rather than describing issues in detail. **The information from the IDRS survey is not representative of illicit drug use in the general population** and nor is the information representative of all illicit drug users. The results are intended to indicate emerging trends to assist policy makers, law enforcers and clinicians.

About the Ecstasy and Related Drug Reporting System (EDRS)

The EDRS is a national illicit drug monitoring system intended to serve as a strategic early warning system, identifying emerging trends of local and national concern in illicit drug markets. The EDRS has three components: interviews with regular psychostimulant users; interviews with key experts, professionals who have regular contact with regular psychostimulant/recreational users through their work; and analysis and examination of indicator data sources related to ecstasy and other related drugs.

The EDRS monitors the price, purity, availability and patterns of use of ecstasy and related drugs (ERD), namely ecstasy, methamphetamine, cocaine, new psychoactive substances, ketamine, GHB, MDA and LSD. ERD includes drugs that are routinely used in the context of entertainment venues and other recreational locations including nightclubs, dance parties, pubs and music festivals. The EDRS is designed to be sensitive to trends, providing data in a timely manner, rather than describing issues in extensive detail. **The results of the EDRS are NOT representative of illicit drug use in the general population.** The results are intended to indicate emerging trends to assist policy makers, law enforcers and clinicians.

The IDRS and EDRS are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

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