

EMBARGO until 7.00am June 5th 2015

Methamphetamine deaths increase across Australia and ice use jumps by 52 per cent among people who inject drugs

5th June 2015

- Accidental drug deaths involving methamphetamine have increased significantly since 2010 jumping from 88 deaths in 2010 to 101 in 2011 and early estimates indicate that deaths involving the drug were as high as 170 in 2013
- Use of crystal methamphetamine (“ice”) among injecting drug users has jumped by 52 per cent in the past 10 years
- 62 per cent of injecting drug users reported using ice in the past six months
- Around 20 per cent of recreational psychostimulant users reported taking ice in the last six months with the group much more likely to use speed powder
- 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 of people who inject drugs 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

Deaths involving methamphetamine have been steadily increasing since 2010 and its use among injecting drug users has increased by 50 per cent over the past 10 years, according to research from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at UNSW.

The Centre’s analysis of accidental death involving methamphetamine has found that 101 accidental drug induced deaths in 2011 (the latest year for which figures are available) involved the drug -- up from 85 in 2011. Early estimates indicate that as many as 170 drug induced deaths involved methamphetamine in 2013.

Another report by the Centre also released today, surveying 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.

The change seen in the reports are supported by treatment data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare which indicate that the proportion of drug treatment episodes amphetamines have been increasing over time and that people aged 20 to 29 are experiencing the highest rates of acute and chronic harms related to their amphetamine use.

Chief investigator of the studies, UNSW Associate Professor Lucy Burns, said the reports indicated a complicated picture of ice use in Australia but the increases in deaths warranted a vigilant approach to monitoring trends and to treatment and prevention.

“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, said Dr Burns.

“It is clear that there has been a change in use of the drug and we are now seeing increasing harms in terms of related deaths, amphetamine related hospital presentations and treatment episodes,” she said.

“What is not clear at this stage is whether the main change is a change in use among people already using drugs or whether new users are coming onto the market.

“We are increasing our monitoring of these trends and clearly our treatment and prevention effort needs to be evaluated to match changing needs.”

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.

[Australian Drug Trends. Findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System \(IDRS\). 2014](#)

[Australian Drug Trends in Ecstasy and Related Drug Markets 2014](#)

[Roxburgh, A. and Burns, L \(2015\). Cocaine and methamphetamine related drug-induced deaths in Australia, 2011. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre](#)

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