



# BREAKING THE ICE IN OUR COMMUNITY

# FACT SHEET

## Harm reduction and methamphetamine use

This fact sheet provides information on harm reduction for people who use methamphetamine, including crystalline methamphetamine (ice). While all drug use poses risks, some people will continue to use drugs and it is important that they know how to reduce harms and protect their health.

- **Methamphetamine increases heart rate**, blood pressure and body temperature. It is important to stay hydrated, keep a bottle of water handy and take frequent sips because you may forget to drink when you are intoxicated and 'on the go'.
- **Be aware**, though, that excessive fluid intake (i.e. more than 1 litre per hour) can sometimes cause brain swelling, convulsions, coma and, in extreme cases, death. This includes all fluids, including alcohol and sports/electrolyte drinks as well as plain water.
- **Cut back on alcohol** as it dehydrates the body. In addition, too many caffeinated or sugary drinks could worsen health problems.
- **Combining drugs**, even with legal substances like alcohol, can cause unpredictable effects and might lead to overdose.
- **Methamphetamine overdose** (toxicity) is a medical emergency. Signs of an overdose can include:
  - hot, flushed or very sweaty skin, which may indicate high fever
  - severe headache
  - chest pain
  - unsteady walking (gait)
  - muscle rigidity, tremors, spasm, fierce jerking movements of the limbs, seizures
  - severe agitation or panic
  - difficulty breathing
  - altered mental state (e.g. confusion, disorientation)

If left untreated, overdose may lead to heart attack, stroke, breakdown of muscle tissue, kidney failure and possibly death.

Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected – tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

- **Methamphetamine can lower inhibitions** and can increase sexual desire. If you're going to use methamphetamine and have sex, make sure you plan ahead by having plenty of condoms, dams, lube and gloves on hand.
- **Prolonged use of methamphetamine** can keep you awake for long periods of time, which can lead to insomnia. Lack of sleep can have serious psychological and physical effects. Try to avoid using methamphetamine for extended periods, and consider organising people that you feel safe with who you could call if you start to feel panicked or paranoid.
- **Injecting methamphetamine** with used injecting equipment increases the likelihood of contracting blood-borne viruses (such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C), blood infections and skin abscesses. NEVER share fits (needles/syringes), spoons, water, filters, alcohol swabs or tourniquets.

In NSW, free sterile injecting equipment is available from Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) outlets and from selected pharmacists. Call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) or visit [www.health.nsw.gov.au/hepatitis/Pages/nsp-outlets.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/hepatitis/Pages/nsp-outlets.aspx) for your nearest NSP outlet.

- **Mouth sores and infections** can be common among people who regularly use methamphetamine. It is important to maintain good oral health, brush and floss your teeth regularly. Drink water or fruit juice or chew gum to keep your mouth moist and to reduce cracks, blisters and clenching. For people who smoke methamphetamine it is important to protect your lips (lip balm will help protect and heal chapped lips), and to use your own equipment and not share it with others.

If you would like further information on harm reduction strategies, NUAA is the statewide drug user organisation in NSW representing people who use drugs, including methamphetamine. It is a peer-based organisation that is staffed by people with lived experience of drug use and is funded by NSW Health to provide harm reduction and education to people who use drugs and to advocate for better policy responses to drug use and treatment in NSW.

NUAA can be reached during office hours on (02) 8354 7300, or 1800 644 413 if you are outside Sydney. View its recent publication on a harm reduction approach to crystalline methamphetamine use (User's News: What Ice Issue?) at [www.usersnews.com.au/articles/what-ice-issue](http://www.usersnews.com.au/articles/what-ice-issue)

**Look after yourself.** If you are concerned about your drug use or have concerns about your general health, seek help. Visit a health professional or contact one of the following for information and advice:

**Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)**  
(02) 9361 8000 (Sydney metro) or 1800 422 599 (outside Sydney metro)

**Stimulant Treatment Line**  
(02) 9361 8088 (Sydney metro) or 1800 101 188 (outside Sydney metro)

**NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)**  
[www.nuaa.org.au](http://www.nuaa.org.au)  
(02) 8354 7300 or 1800 644 413 (outside Sydney metro)

**S-Check (Stimulant Check-Up)**  
(02) 9361 8079 – general physical and mental health check for people who use stimulants (ice, cocaine, ecstasy)

**ACON Alcohol and other drugs program**  
[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au) (02) 9206 2000

**Breaking the Ice (Australian Drug Foundation) website**  
[www.adf.org.au/breakingtheice](http://www.adf.org.au/breakingtheice)  
A joint project by the Australian Drug Foundation and NSW Health aiming to reduce harms from crystalline methamphetamine (ice) in NSW

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