



Methamphetamine (Meth) Use, Trafficking, and Treatment

The drug use problem in the United States changes as new drugs are developed, currently used drugs go out of fashion, and old drugs regain their popularity. One of today's drug problems involves meth, a drug problem that has been described in some areas as a "methademic" (meth epidemic). There are a number of data sources available to examine the meth problem in the U.S. Some of these data sources provide information on use rates and admissions to drug treatment programs while others document the law enforcement response to drug use and/or trafficking. This research overview presents a summary of the meth problem in the U.S. and Alaska using the most recent available data.

Meth Use Data

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) provides data on drug use and drug trends by interviewing a random sample of over 60,000 people aged 12 and older annually. NSDUH data describe drug use patterns in the general population. One way to characterize the meth problem in the United States is to examine adult meth use with NSDUH data.

- Adult use: In 2007, 1.3 million adults (0.5% of the U.S. population) reported past year meth use. NSDUH also provides information on the prevalence of current meth use. Past month meth use was reported by 0.2% of the U.S. population (529,000 people), and 0.4% of 18 to 25 year olds.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is conducted annually, and in 2007 involved a sample of 1,318 students from 38 high schools across the nation. YRBS data provides another way to characterize the meth problem in the United States by examining lifetime meth use among youth.

- Youth — YRBS: Among high school students in the U.S. as indicated by the YRBS, 3.6% of ninth graders, 4.1% of tenth graders, 5.4% of eleventh graders, and 4.5% of twelfth graders reported using meth at least once in their lifetime.

Another source of data on youth substance use is Monitoring the Future (MTF) which surveys over 45,000 students in 386 schools annually. MTF data provides a way of characterizing the meth problem in the United States by examining past year meth use among youth.

- Youth — MTF: Among high school students in the U.S. as indicated by MTF, 1.2% of eighth graders, 1.5% of tenth, and 1.2% of twelfth graders reported past year meth use.

Law Enforcement Data

The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) compiles information on drug trafficking via law enforcement detection and arrests. The NDIC's National Drug Threat Assessment report acknowledges that meth availability in the U.S. is influenced by both foreign and domestic production. Law enforcement control efforts are documented by meth seizures, lab seizures, and law enforcement reports regarding the extent of the meth problem.

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- Drug seizures: The NDIC report indicates that 6,335.66 kilograms of meth were seized by law enforcement agents in 2008, which surpassed 2007 seizures.
- Lab seizures: While there was an annual increase in the kilograms of meth seized by law enforcement, the number of meth labs seized nationally has declined over the last several years from 10,013 lab seizures in 2004 to 2,584 in 2008 (partial year through the middle of November). Though the number of lab seizures nationwide has declined, some areas of the country have experienced increases in meth lab seizures.

Treatment Data

The Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) provides annual information on approximately 1.8 million admissions to funded substance abuse treatment facilities. Treatment admissions are another way to characterize the meth problem in the U.S.

- Overall proportion: TEDS reports that in 2006 (the most recent year for which data is available) nine percent of all admissions for substance abuse treatment were for primary meth use (includes amphetamines and other stimulants).
- Change over time: Change in primary meth admissions to treatment facilities can be examined by looking at the rate of change in primary meth admissions as well as the percentage of change in primary meth admissions relative to admissions for all drugs. The primary meth admission rate increased 156% from 1996 to 2006. The percentage of all substance abuse treatment admissions that involved primary meth use increased from three percent in 1996 to nine percent in 2006.

Meth in Alaska

- Use: The most detailed and up-to-date data on meth use rates in Alaska is only available for high school students through the YRBS. The YRBS data indicate that the percentage of 10th and 11th graders reporting any meth use (6.1% and 6.5% respectively) in their lifetime is higher than that reported nationwide (4.1% for tenth graders and 5.4% of eleventh graders).
- Enforcement: The Alaska Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Enforcement (ABADE) collects law enforcement data on meth and meth lab seizures as well as on meth-related charges in Alaska. In 2008, 3,849.63 grams of meth were seized by law enforcement officers in Alaska. This marked a three-year reduction in the amount of meth seized in the state. ABADE also reported 12 meth lab seizures in 2008. ABADE reported 128 meth-related charges or arrests in Alaska during 2008. This was a reduction from 2007, but an increase from 2006.
- Treatment: TEDS reports that in 2003 (the last year for which data is available) the number of admissions to treatment facilities in Alaska for primary meth abuse had nearly doubled since 1996. The number of treatment admissions increased from 38 in 1996 to 49 in 1998 and then remained steady until 2002. The number of treatment admissions then increased to 80 in 2002 and declined to 70 in 2003. Treatment admissions data for Alaska from 2004 to 2006 is not available in TEDS.

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Selected References

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