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for a general audience

“Ice”

Crystal methamphetamine hydrochloride

What is “ice”?

“Ice” is a street name for crystal methamphetamine hydrochloride, which is a powerful, synthetic stimulant drug. Stimulant drugs speed up the messages going to and from the brain.

Ice is more potent than other forms of amphetamines. It is more pure than the powder form of methamphetamines (“speed”).

Ice often appears as large, transparent and “sheet-like” crystals that may have a hint of pink, blue or green colour.

Other street names for ice include “meth”, “d-meth”, “crystal”, “crystal meth”, “shabu” “batu”, “tina” and “glass”.

How is it used?

Ice is known to be smoked, swallowed, snorted, injected or inserted anally (“shafting”). Some people smoke ice using a glass pipe, while others heat it on aluminium foil and inhale the vapours (“chasing”).

Ice use in Australia

- In 2004, 3.2 per cent of Australians aged 14 years and older had used amphetamines for non-medical purposes in the previous year and over 38 per cent of this group reported the type of amphetamine they used was ice.¹
- Ice use among injecting drug users increased from 15 per cent in 2000 to 52 per cent in 2004.²
- In 2004, 63 per cent of a sample of people who used ecstasy had tried ice at least once and 45 per cent had used ice in the past 6 months.³

What are the effects of ice?

The effects of any drug (including ice) vary from person to person, depending on the individual’s

size, weight and health, how much and how the drug is taken, whether the person is used to taking it and whether other drugs are taken. Effects also depend on the environment in which the drug is used—such as whether the person is alone, with others or at a party.

Immediate effects

Soon after taking ice, a person may experience a number of psychological and physical effects including:

- feelings of euphoria, excitement and well being
- increased alertness, confidence and libido, more energy, feelings of increased strength, talkativeness, restlessness, repeating simple acts, and itching, picking and scratching
- tremors of the hands and fingers
- speeding up of bodily functions, such as increased breathing rate, body temperature, blood pressure, a rapid and irregular heartbeat and excessive sweating
- difficulty sleeping, reduced appetite, dilated pupils, dry mouth, stomach cramps, nausea, dizziness, blurred vision and severe headaches
- abrupt shifts in thought and speech, which can make someone using ice difficult to understand
- nervousness, panic attacks, anxiety, paranoia
- irritability, aggression, hostility and “amphetamine psychosis”, including hallucinations, paranoid delusions and bizarre behaviour.

The variable purity of each batch of ice increases the risk of negative effects and overdose.

Coming down

As the effects of ice wear off, a person may experience a range of symptoms such as tension, depression, radical mood swings, uncontrollable violence and exhaustion.

Long-term effects

Long-term use of ice can result in a number of health issues, including:

- high blood pressure and increased risk of heart-related complications such as heart attack and heart failure
- malnutrition and rapid weight loss due to reduced appetite
- chronic sleeping problems
- reduced immunity and increased susceptibility to infections due to the person not sleeping or eating properly
- depression, anxiety, tension and paranoia
- brain damage (there is some evidence that amphetamines may damage brain cells resulting in reduced memory function and other impairments in thinking)
- dental problems (from grinding teeth)
- smoking ice can damage the lungs
- snorting ice can damage the lining of the nose
- injecting ice can lead to scarring, abscesses and vein damage. Sharing injecting equipment increases the risk of contracting blood-borne viruses, such as hepatitis B and C, and HIV.

Other effects and issues

Due to some of the effects of ice, some people may be more prone to practice unsafe sex. This increases the chances of contracting sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne viruses, such as hepatitis B and C, and HIV.

As well as health problems, using ice (or any drug) can result in family, financial, legal, work, school and other personal problems. These problems can be made much worse because some people who use ice can become irritable, hostile and violent and/or experience other psychological problems. It is also dangerous to drive a vehicle or operate machinery after using ice.

Ice and pregnancy

Using ice while pregnant can affect the development of the foetus. Amphetamine use has been linked with bleeding, early labour, an increased risk of foetal abnormalities and changes to the brain.

If amphetamines are used close to birth the baby may be unsettled, overactive and agitated. Babies

born to mothers who regularly used amphetamines during their pregnancy may experience withdrawal symptoms after birth.

Tolerance and dependence

People who use ice can quickly develop a tolerance to the drug so that increasingly greater doses are needed to achieve the desired effects. Ice can also lead to physical and/or psychological dependence. People who are psychologically dependent on ice find that using it becomes far more important than other activities in their life. They crave the drug and find it very difficult to stop using it. Physical dependence occurs when a person's body adapts to the drug and the body gets used to functioning with the drug present. If a person who is physically dependent on ice suddenly stops taking it they may experience withdrawal symptoms.

Withdrawal

Some of the symptoms people may experience once they have stopped using ice include:

- disorientation
- hunger
- extreme fatigue and exhaustion
- decreased energy, apathy and the limited ability to experience pleasure
- anxiety, irritability and depression
- craving ice.

For information on amphetamines, other drugs and drug prevention, visit our website at www.druginfo.adf.org.au or contact the DrugInfo Clearinghouse Resource Centre on tel. 1300 85 85 84.

References

- ¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2005 *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Detailed findings*, Canberra: AIHW
- ² National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) 2005 *Australian Drug Trends 2004: Findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System*, Sydney: NDARC
- ³ NCDARC 2005 *Australian Trends in Ecstasy and Related Drug Markets 2004: Findings from the Party Drug Initiative*, Sydney: NDARC