

# HSI Connection

Helping People • Changing Lives

## *The Dark Spiral:* Methamphetamine Abuse in Washington County

### Did You Know?

- 4% of all 9th Graders and 6% of all 12th Graders in Washington County Schools have used meth in the last 12 months.

*2004 Minnesota Student Survey*

- Even small amounts of meth can produce serious negative effects on your body such as hyperthermia and convulsions, which sometimes result in death to the user.

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Methamphetamine abuse is a serious problem currently ravaging the lives of thousands of people daily. Not only has this drug affected large populations within the nation as a whole, but it is currently devastating countless lives right here within Washington County. The dark downward spiral of methamphetamine use affects all racial, social, ethnic, economic and religious groups.

The abusers of methamphetamines are common, everyday people that we encounter during our daily travels. They are our waiters, bus drivers, car mechanics, librarians, lawyers, office workers and in more unfortunate circumstances, the children who live on our blocks and attend our neighborhood schools.

One of the major reasons explaining the widespread use of this drug is the unimaginably strong hold it maintains over its users. The addictive qualities of methamphetamines are so incredibly powerful that individuals can become "hooked" after having taken the drug only once or twice. If methamphetamine use becomes chronic, those addicted develop erratic and self-destructive behaviors that can quickly become dangerous not only for themselves but for others living within their home and community as well. Children who reside in a house where methamphetamines are either being produced or used are at extreme risk of suffering from either physical abuse and/or neglect as the priorities of the addicted parent(s) become wholly distorted. As their disease worsens, users become increasingly unable to hold down employment, maintain healthy relationships, and may eventually turn to criminal activity in order to support their habit.

"Increasing meth abuse is putting a strain on existing resources and maxing a lot of them

out such as social services, probation, public health, sheriff and county attorney's offices," states Doug Johnson, Washington County Attorney. "We are finding that a very high percentage of our criminal cases end up being meth related. Law enforcement is seeing non-drug cases such as writing a bad check is related to meth use. Usually when we go deeper into a case there is a drug problem driving that crime."

### What is Methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine (meth) is a man-made stimulant that has been classified as an illegal narcotic. Due to the fact that methamphetamines are relatively simple to make using commonly found chemical ingredients, it has become incredibly inexpensive to produce and purchase - making it readily available. As a result, the prevalence of meth abuse has grown at an alarming rate in recent years.

Slang terms for the drug are wide and varied. Some of the more common names include "crank", "crystal", "rails", "powder", "ice", and "glass." Most often it is referred to by both law enforcement and users alike as "meth." For people who suffer from a full-scale addiction, terms like "tweakers" or "meth-heads" are used to describe their rather unstable condition.

Meth is typically administered by smoking it through a small ceramic or glass pipe, or by crushing it into powder form and snorting. In addition, meth can be mixed with a touch of water and heated on the head of a spoon not unlike heroin using a lighter. Once liquefied, the drug can be injected directly into the blood stream using a needle and syringe.

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# Methamphetamine Abuse in Washington County

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## Warning Signs and Indications of Methamphetamine Use:

- ✓ Repeated displays of extreme energy for long periods of time
- ✓ Erratic sleep patterns (extended periods of sleep or sleep deprivation)
- ✓ Unnatural or unhealthy eating habits
- ✓ Sudden or dramatic weight loss
- ✓ Chronic state of high irritability and fits of violence and/or irrational rages manic episodes
- ✓ Repeated episodes of severe and unfounded paranoia
- ✓ Appearance of sores, lesions, or severe scratch marks on the body
- ✓ Erratic finances (repeatedly borrowing money, inability to hold a job, theft, selling off personal possessions)
- ✓ Evidence of seeing or hearing things that aren't there

## Important Information:

The information that is provided in this newsletter is not to be used to diagnose individual cases. Each individual is unique, only a professional healthcare provider is qualified to diagnose illness and prescribe treatment.

## Effects of Meth Use on the body

Addictive drugs have two things in common. They produce an initial pleasurable effect, followed by a rebound unpleasant effect. The normal production of adrenaline is suppressed by the drug which now creates a chemical imbalance. This result causes irritability that physically demands more of the drug to go back to normal and feel good again. This pleasure/tension cycle leads to loss of control over amphetamines—and addiction.

Once it has been introduced into the body, meth quickly produces a profound sensation of energy, or a “rush”. This is quickly followed by reports of having a deep feeling of euphoria or invincibility. When the user has achieved a state of intoxication or a “high,” any residual pain or unhappiness that they might have felt seemingly disappears. The most common result of this effect is a user’s tendency to associate *happiness* and a *pain-free existence* with the use of methamphetamines. A state of sexual arousal also develops - often times leading to promiscuous behavior.

The physiological changes that the body undergoes are sudden and powerful. Dopamine, the primary chemical responsible for generating feelings of happiness within the brain is forcibly released at a highly unbalanced rate. The user’s heartbeat accelerates to a dangerous pace (*Tachycardia*), causing blood pressure levels to rise swiftly (*Hypertension*). The core temperature of the body begins to heat up – causing profuse sweating and creating the very real potential for self-induced heat stroke (*Hyperthermia*). At this stage, the user is physically excited, feeling the emotions associated with happiness, and full of a seemingly boundless amount of energy.

The potential for permanent damage occurring to internal organs is high. The body’s own ability to produce and distribute dopamine (the chemical in charge of making you happy) becomes weaker with each successive use. The meth abuser can become physically unable to feel happiness or experience joy on their own without the continued assistance of the drug. Repeated use could also lead to severe heart damage and a hardening of the veins and arteries. As a result, there is an increased risk for the user to experience

a heart attack and/or a stroke while using meth.

## Behaviors of a Meth User

The most common characteristics of a person on a meth high is the unnatural amounts of energy exploding through their every movement. They tend to be unable to sit still for more than a few seconds, and often times are given to strange bouts of obsessive cleaning. Their conversational habits become disjointed and tend to skip around from one random idea to another without any real logic.

Once in the state of an increased energy, the user has extreme trouble in calming themselves down – with the very real prospect of becoming suddenly and unexplainably agitated – capable of resorting to violence without warning. With the potential combination of having feelings of “invincibility” while possessing excessive amounts of energy, many resort to physical confrontations with little or no warning. It is also commonplace for the meth user to become preoccupied with paranoid fantasies or suspicions. Such volatile and unpredictable responses can transform even the most mild-mannered person into a dangerous and aggressive threat not only to themselves but for others as well.

After taking meth, the prospect of falling asleep becomes incredibly difficult. Due to the feelings of boundless energy, the user finds it increasingly difficult to slow themselves down to rest and/or sleep causing users to stay awake for long stretches of time – ranging from several hours to even several days. After remaining awake for prolonged periods, they run the risk of experiencing both audio and visual hallucinations such as hearing or seeing things that aren’t there as a result of sleep deprivation. Such hallucinations further aggravate their erratic behavior.

The meth user also finds that their appetite drastically decreases with each successive high. Because of this, the chronic user sheds weight at a noticeable and alarming rate. Their poor nutritional eating habits – when combined with the toxic chemicals present within the drug - also contribute to other

bodily changes. Hair thinning and teeth loss has been known to happen to abusers of meth, as do the appearance of little skin abrasions known as “crank bugs.” Because of the excessive amounts of energy felt during the high and the toxicity of the drug, meth users experience itching sensations that prove so irritable that users repeatedly scratch themselves over the same areas of their body (most often the face, hands, arms, feet, and legs) until they draw blood. Their skin becomes so torn and shredded that little open sores remain upon the surface of the skin for several days and are easily visible.

Once the drug has run its course through the user’s body, an extreme tiredness takes hold. This stage is often characterized by long periods of almost comatose-like sleep, interrupted by brief moments of semi-consciousness where the user continues to behave in abnormal ways. During the times when they are awake, users often have the appearance of being severely irritable or dramatically over sensitive. They also have a tendency to be abnormally absent-minded – as though they were “sleep-walking” through their day.

### Impact On Your Community

“We have a heightened awareness of the growing emergence of meth use and production in our communities,” states Sandy Morelli, manager of HSI’s Chemical Health Division. “Last year we saw a 44% increase of clients reporting that their drug of choice was meth.”

One of the more dangerous side activities associated with meth is how the drug is produced. Comprised of common household chemicals, propane, and Pseudophedrin – an ingredient found in almost all over-the-counter medications relating to cold relief

and decongestion – meth can be easily “cooked up” in small spaces using regular kitchen utensils. The ingredients used are exceedingly toxic and are extremely harmful if exposed to humans without safety equipment. The results of such exposure often times runs the risk of severe skin rashes, or damage the cornea of the eye or burning of the capillaries in a person’s lungs due to the noxious fumes coming from the meth lab.

In addition to these risks, there is also a strong potential for structural damage to a house that has a meth lab. If some of the chemicals used within the production of methamphetamines are not handled correctly there is an increased risk of fire or explosions - such as with propane. The “cooking” of meth has also become an ecological hazard that can immediately and drastically pollute the surrounding environment. Meth labs leave approximately 6 pounds of hazardous toxic waste for each pound of meth produced.

Often times, leftover chemicals and by-products are poured down household drains, wells, storm drains or directly on the ground which remains in the soil and groundwater for years. The toxicity of the chemicals being dumped can poison those who live in and around the area if they should come into contact with that particular region or the water table below.

At an estimated cost upwards of \$20,000 per lab, cleanup costs are extremely high because soil, building and other materials must be cleaned and if can’t be washed or sealed, must be removed and incinerated. Within Minnesota, 165 labs were shut down last year by law enforcement, with 9 sites found and eliminated within

Washington County alone. Working in conjunction with public health officials, chemical health service providers (such as HSI), the county attorney’s office, and the Sheriff’s department, Washington County has established a methamphetamine *taskforce* created for the specific purposes of targeting and eliminating the presence of methamphetamines within the region.

### Help Is Available

If you or someone you know is suffering from methamphetamine addiction, there are effective treatment options available. Despite the powerfully addictive nature of this drug - and the high potential for permanent damage occurring to the body - there are methods for which a user can break the cycle of addiction and regain control of their lives.

Current treatment options include extended inpatient programs with a focus on assessing the mental health status of the patient, outpatient treatment plans to aid recovering addicts and to assist them in reentering society, weekly support groups, and highly trained drug counselors and sponsors available for additional support and therapy.

HSI is part of a statewide network of community mental health centers and is committed to providing affordable behavioral health services. HSI is a provider for Medical Assistance-Pre-paid Medical Assistance Programs (PMAP), Medicare, Minnesota Care, as well as a large number of commercial insurance plans. For further information or help with methamphetamine abuse call 651-430-2720 for an appointment, or just to talk it over with a trained counselor.

# Methamphetamine & Kids

The effects of methamphetamine abuse and meth production can be very devastating to children. It is reported that in 50 – 60% of all Minnesota meth labs, children are found to live within these homes.

Children who live in homes with meth labs are at higher risk of abuse, neglect and endangerment. Substance abuse is believed to cause or intensify 7 out of 10 cases of child abuse and neglect.

In such cases where children are involved, federal laws dictates that the child(ren) must be within a safe home within 6-12 months depending on the child's age. Washington County's attorney Doug Johnson says, "If a parent is meth abuser, parents with children under the age of 8 years old are given 6 months to correct the situation, 12 months if the child(ren) are older. If a parent doesn't get clean child protection then must place the child with relatives or they are put up for adoption."

For the unborn child, there are serious concerns of the impact the mother's meth use has on

the development of the fetus during pregnancy and after birth. There is a high risk of exposure to chemicals or addiction for the baby through inhalation of smoke or in the mother's breast milk.

The chaotic meth environment causes children to experience extreme stress and trauma impacting their overall safety and health, including their behavioral and emotional functioning. These children often exhibit low self-esteem, poor social skills and a sense of shame. Many may develop emotional and mental health problems, struggle with poor school performance, and isolate themselves. If effective intervention is not done, many children will repeat the behaviors of their parents or caretakers.

If you are concerned about a young persons alcohol or other drug use, there are Chemical Health Prevention Specialists in each of the senior high schools. For more information about services contact your child's school or HSI at 651-430-2720.

## What's Cooking In Your Neighborhood?

Washington County has seen an increase in the number of meth users, labs and arrests over the last three years. Citizens can play an important part in identifying potential meth labs in the community. If you observe any combination of these activities, **do not confront your neighbor. Report your concerns to your local police or the sheriff immediately.**

### Signs of a Potential Meth Lab and What You Can Do

- Frequent visitors at odd hours or late at night
- Occupants appear unemployed, yet seem to have plenty of money and pay with cash
- Occupants unfriendly, secretive or display paranoid or odd behavior
- Occupants watch cars suspiciously when they pass
- Cameras or baby monitors in yard or porch; signs that indicate "Private Property" or "Beware of Dog"; fences, etc.
- Windows blackened or curtains always drawn
- Occupants go outside to smoke
- Chemical odors coming from the house, garbage, or detached buildings

- Garbage contains numerous bottles, containers, or materials such as cold pills, alcohol, kitty litter, lithium batteries, fertilizer, etc.
- Coffee filters, bed sheets, or other materials stained from filtering red phosphorous or other chemicals
- Occupant sets garbage for pick up in another neighbor's collection area
- Evidence of chemical or waste dumping (i.e. burn pits, or "dead spots" in the yard)
- Meth makers or those living with them may smell of solvents, ether, or of ammonia/cat urine

### If You Suspect or Find a Meth Lab report your concerns to your local police or the sheriff immediately.

- Leave the area immediately
- Do not disturb the cooking process
- Dial 911

Courtesy of - Methamphetamine Labs: Neighborhood Resource Guide, MN National Guard Counterdrug Team

### Risks to Children Living in Labs

- ✓ fire and explosion
- ✓ weapons and accidents
- ✓ poisoning and toxic exposure
- ✓ poor nutrition, health care, and parenting

### Health Concerns in Children Exposed to Meth Labs

- ✓ red and itchy eyes
- ✓ chronic cough
- ✓ skin rashes and burns
- ✓ chronic respiratory problems
- ✓ body odor that smells of chemicals or cat urine

### Long Term Exposure of Children to Meth Labs

- ✓ learning disabilities
- ✓ delayed speech and language
- ✓ meth addiction
- ✓ kidney, liver, and spleen damage
- ✓ erratic sleeping habits
- ✓ neurological damage (not known how long term)

Compiled by Lisa Hoogheem, Chemical Health & Violence Prevention Coordinator – ISD 622

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## From the CEO...

The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that about nine million people or four percent of the U.S. population have used methamphetamine once in their lifetime. High school seniors report in slightly higher at about six percent. Here in Minnesota, the "Minnesota Student Survey" reports a somewhat lower number – four percent use among seniors. Use is growing however; when you combine the powerful effects of this drug with easy access, more addicts are being created daily.

Most researchers report that meth addiction happens more quickly and is more difficult to treat than other addictions. The damaging impact of meth addiction is also more abrupt and severe than most other dependencies. But **there is hope**. Although it may take longer and wreak serious life damage before it is interrupted - **meth addiction is treatable**. An equally important strategy is to emphasize prevention through initiatives that not only limit access, but also provide education and outreach to young adults who may be experimenting with drug use. The medically harmful effects of meth use are well documented and sufficiently compelling to inform education initiatives for those most at risk for abuse and addiction. The simple act of a parent talking to a child about drug abuse can make a real difference.

This addition of HSI's newsletter is focused on describing some of the devastating effects of methamphetamine and its abuse. If you or someone you care about is using meth, help is available. Call 651-430-2720 for an assessment and recommendations about how to begin the recovery process. If you have children in school, talk to them about this very serious issue.

## QUESTIONS.... WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

Like more information about our services? Call 651-777-5222

## A Good Place to Start

Important Care for your elderly loved one



HSI Circle of Friends is an adult day program for people age 55 and older that provides licensed care to people with special needs, such as those experiencing memory loss, chronic illness, disability, depression, loneliness or post-hospitalization assistance. This affordable and flexible service provides personal care, monitors health and medication plan, conducts activities and exercise, serves nutritious meals and snacks, and offers personal hygiene and foot care.

For caregivers, the program offers needed respite. Time is freed-up to run errands, keep appointments, work, visit friends, or just provide some well-deserved rest. Transportation may also be available with HSI Transporters.

The program runs on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with extended hours available upon request, at two locations: Oak Park Heights in Boutwells Landing or Woodbury in Woodbury Estates.

For more information or to arrange a visit to Circle of Friends, call 651-275-5801

## Resources & Support

**HSI**  
7066 Stillwater Blvd. N.  
Oakdale, MN 55128  
651-777-5222  
www.hsicare.org

**Washington County  
Community Services**  
To report suspected  
child abuse or neglect,  
call Social Services  
Child Intake  
(M-F, 7:30-4:30)  
651-430-6457

**Washington County  
Department of Public Health  
& Environment**  
651-430-6781  
www.co.washington.mn.us

**AA (24 hour help line)**  
651-227-5502  
1-212-647-1680

**Alanon/Alateen**  
651-771-2208  
1-800-344-2666

**Dual Recovery  
Group Anonymous**  
MN Area  
651-251-5054

**Narcotic Anonymous**  
(24 hour help line)  
612-939-3939

**Center for Substance Abuse  
Treatment National Help line**  
1-800-662-4357

**National Institute on  
Drug Abuse, National  
Institutes of Health**  
1-888-644-6432  
www.drugabuse.gov

**National Clearinghouse for  
Alcohol and Drug  
Information**  
1-800-729-6686  
www.health.org

**Minnesota Prevention  
Resource Center**  
1-800-247-1303  
www.miph.org/mprc

# HSI

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## HSI *Connection*

### FEATURE FOCUS

Even small amounts of meth can produce serious negative effects on your body such as hyperthermia and convulsions, which sometimes result in death to the user.

## HELPING YOUR COMMUNITY

### *10K Run/Walk for HSI*

**Saturday, August 20th - 8:00 a.m.**

Enjoy the natural beauty of the river, woods and wildlife as you run or walk scenic Larson Quarry on Grey Cloud Island. This USATF certified course begins and ends at Aggregate Industries, sponsor of our run. All proceeds from this event will benefit the programs and services at HSI. "One of the reasons we selected HSI," says race director Patty Christensen of Aggregate Industries, "is that they are a charity that serves our most needy and all of Washington County." HSI annually serves more than 8,600 residents by providing multi-services for children, adolescents, adults and families who face daily struggles related to mental health, chemical dependency and domestic or sexual abuse.

In addition, HSI provides services for the elderly and adults with special needs, which include nutritional services such as Meals on Wheels and congregate dining, and door-through-door transportation on the HSI Transporter. For more River Run information, go to [www.raceberryjam.com](http://www.raceberryjam.com) or [www.active.com](http://www.active.com), or call Patty Christensen at 651-683-8133.



### *HSI 14th Annual Charity Golf Classic*

**Monday, July 25th - 11:30 a.m.  
Stillwater Country Club**

Join us for a fun day of golf at the beautiful Stillwater Country Club, in historic Stillwater.

Lee Valsvik, local television and radio personality will serve as celebrity golfer and emcee of the banquet. Prizes will be awarded to the top teams. Registration at 11:30 play begins at 1 p.m. followed by a social hour and silent auction. Donations in the silent auction include golf outings for four at various golf courses as well as tickets to the Twins and Saints games, photograph signed by Duante Cullpepper, overnight get-aways, and much more. Plus, hole-in-one prizes of a car from Merit Chevrolet and a cash prize of \$10,000. For sponsorship, golf information, or to donate to the silent auction, please call 651-251-5010.

**HSI's mission is to help people overcome and prevent life impairments by developing individual potential and promoting meaningful participation in family and community life.**