



Advisory:

Methamphetamine-related harm

March 2025

The purpose of this advisory is to highlight an emerging trend of harm associated with methamphetamine use and provide advice for healthcare and community practitioners who support people who may use this substance. The increase in harm coincides with an increase in methamphetamine consumption nationally as measured in wastewater, and a decrease in street price.

Current Situation:

Over recent months methamphetamine consumption detected in wastewater has almost doubled. It is assessed as almost certain that this increase is due to a combination of increased availability and decreased street price. Greater availability and cheaper prices have likely resulted in people who use methamphetamine consuming greater quantities.

High Alert has become aware of several cases of intravenous methamphetamine-related harm that required hospitalisation. Symptoms included severe dysphoria, tachycardia, tremor, and hyperthermia. In all cases, only methamphetamine was detected and no other suspicious substances were involved. It is likely the harm is due to larger quantities or higher purity methamphetamine being consumed.

Risk:

Increased availability and a decrease in price likely allow people who use methamphetamine to purchase greater quantities, meaning they are able to use more, and more frequently, increasing the risk of harm. It is possible there has also been an increase in the purity of methamphetamine due to the increased levels of supply, as supply is less likely to be cut.

Methamphetamine is an amphetamine and a stimulant. The effects can be unpredictable and can change depending on how much is used, how often and for how long. The effects usually last 4–12 hours.

The effects of a high dose of methamphetamine can include:

- Intense hyperactivity
- Intense euphoria or dysphoria
- Sudden personality changes
- Severe anxiety
- Serious disturbances in mental abilities (delirium)
- Feeling violent
- Psychosis
- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Seizures
- Loss of consciousness
- Severely elevated temperature (hyperthermia)

This can look different in cases where methamphetamine has been mixed with alcohol or other drugs.

It is not known if the increase in consumption seen in wastewater will be sustained long-term. However, there are concerns more people will experience unexpected adverse effects due to their increased use of methamphetamine, possibly leading to hospitalisation.

What You Can Do:

It is recommended health professionals remain vigilant of increased use in methamphetamine, open to the reality that a range of people may be using it. Health professionals are advised to familiarise themselves with the signs of high-dose methamphetamine harm, and communicate harm reduction advice to those likely to be using this substance.

Call 111 and ask for an ambulance immediately if someone:

- Has a very high temperature (they may be sweating)
- Has difficulty breathing
- Is extremely agitated or confused
- Has chest pains
- Has a seizure, convulsions or tremors
- Loses consciousness

Harm reduction advice for people who use methamphetamine should include:

- **Swallowing methamphetamine may be less risky than other ways of taking it.** Swallowing methamphetamine or mixing it into a drink can help avoid the damage that some other methods of using can have on the body. This method delivers the drug to the body more slowly, so wait an hour before re-dosing as the effects may not be felt straight away. Re-dosing too quickly increases the chance of overdose.
- **Lower doses are less risky.** Start off with a small amount to check how it affects you. Potency can vary between batches and even doses. Remember, a low dose for one person can be a high dose for another as people's bodies process drugs differently.
- **When injecting methamphetamine, use new, sterile equipment every time.** Use new and sterile needles, filters and butterflies and sterile water every time. These are available from [needle exchanges](#) across New Zealand. This helps to reduce skin infections and the transmission of diseases like HIV and hepatitis from sharing needles. More information about safer injecting is available [here](#) on the New Zealand Drug Foundation website, The Level.
- **When smoking methamphetamine, use a glass shatterproof pipe.** This will help prevent cuts or burns. If possible, a mouthpiece is also recommended to avoid burns to the lips. Avoid sharing pipes with others as this can spread disease and infection.
- **Drug checking is recommended to help lower the risks.** Drug checking services can identify when a substance has been adulterated or misrepresented. Find upcoming clinics at [The Level](#). There are also testing options available for those who cannot attend a free, legal drug checking clinic. Fentanyl and nitazene test strips can be ordered [here](#) for free from the New Zealand Drug Foundation. Reagent tests can also be used – these are legally available from the Hemp store or Cosmic.
- **MethHelp offers free and confidential nationwide phone counselling.** Call 0800 METH HELP (0800 638 443) or [visit the website](#) for more information.

The National Poisons Centre is also available 24/7 to help members of the public and healthcare professionals with clinical advice for this, or any other substance - please call 0800 764 766 (0800 POISON).

If you receive any information regarding increased harm related to methamphetamine, or have noticed changes in methamphetamine use in your communities, please get in contact with High Alert by emailing highalert@highalert.org.nz.

HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS

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Please share this report with anyone in your organisation who may benefit from the information.

Please email highalert@highalert.org.nz if you would like to share information with other partners.