

Health Risks

Meth can cause long-term health effects including cancer, brain damage, birth defects and miscarriages. It also can cause memory loss, heart problems, aggression and violence.

Meth causes health problems not just for the users, but also for others who are unintentionally exposed to the chemical.

People who enter a drug lab after a police bust has been completed, but before it has been properly cleaned and ventilated, may feel headaches, nausea, dizziness and fatigue. These symptoms usually go away after several hours.

People who enter a lab during or immediately after a drug bust may experience shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, burns and even death.



An explosion in a meth lab started the fire that destroyed this building in Thurston County. Labs may also be set with booby traps - another reason to stay clear.

Who to Call

To report a suspected lab:
NW HIDTA (Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area), 1-888-609-6384

General questions, concerns about health effects of meth:
Washington State Department of Health, 1-888-586-9427



For More Information

Several brochures are available by calling the offices that produced them or by contacting your local county health department:

“Meth: Frequently Asked Questions about Methamphetamine” and “Methamphetamine Safety Education Program” produced by Project S.A.F.E. of TOGETHER! 360-493-2230

“What’s Happened? An illegal meth lab has been busted on this property...” and “Illegal Methamphetamine Labs Fact Sheet” produced by the Washington State Department of Health. 1-888-586-9427.

Is There a Meth Lab In My Neighborhood?

Learn the signs of an illegal methamphetamine operation.

If you suspect a meth lab, call:
1-888-609-6384

If it’s an emergency, call:
911

What is Meth?

Methamphetamine (meth) is a powerful, highly toxic, addictive drug that is illegally “cooked” in make-shift labs. Meth can be found in the form of pills, capsules, powder or chunks; it can be smoked, snorted, injected or eaten. Meth was developed from amphetamine, but has much stronger effects on the central nervous system. Meth is also called crank, speed, crystal or ice.

Warning Signs of Living Near a Lab

- Strong odor of solvents
- Residences with windows blacked out
- Iodine- or chemical-stained bathroom or kitchen fixtures
- Renters who pay their landlords in cash
- Increased activity, especially at night
- Excessive trash

Common Meth Lab Supplies

Plastic tubing
Mason jars
Propane tanks (sometimes spray-painted or burned, with bent or tampered valves)
Camp stove fuel
Empty pill bottles
Empty cans of toluene, alcohol or paint thinner
Ammonia
Starter fluid
Glass containers
Coffee filters with red stains
Funnels
Rock salt, iodine
Lithium batteries
Hydrogen peroxide
Ephedrine or pseudoephedrine tablets



The most common chemicals used to start the meth-making process are over-the-counter cold and asthma medications. Typical brands include Sudafed, Revive, and Mini-thins, which contain ephedrine or pseudoephedrine as decongestants or stimulants.

If You Suspect a Meth Lab...

Do not enter a site that you think may be used for cooking meth. Labs present extreme dangers from explosions and exposure to hazardous chemicals. Breathing the fumes, and handling substances, can cause injury and even death.

Drug labs are considered hazardous waste sites and should only be entered by trained and equipped professionals.

Never handle materials you suspect were used for making meth, such as contaminated glassware and needles. Skin contact can result in burns or poisoning. Handling items can also cause some of the chemicals to explode on contact with water or air.

Consider that when professionals respond to a drug lab, they do not enter the building until they have put on chemically resistant suits and boots, special gloves and respirators.

A typical meth lab contains a variety of glassware, a power source, tubing, containers of chemicals and pills, and pressurized tanks or containers.



How to Recognize a Meth Lab

Meth labs may be set up at campgrounds, rest areas, rental homes, motel rooms, abandoned cars, garages, storage sheds, barns, and vacant buildings.

A typical meth lab is a collection of chemical bottles, hoses and pressurized cylinders. The cylinders can take many forms, from modified propane tanks to fire extinguishers, scuba tanks and soda dispensers. The tanks contain anhydrous ammonia or hydrochloric acid – both highly poisonous and corrosive.

Labs are frequently abandoned, and the potentially explosive and very toxic chemicals are left behind. Chemicals may also be burned or dumped in woods or along roads.