

AIDS Foundation

OF CHICAGO

Crystal Methamphetamine Gay Men, and HIV/AIDS

What is crystal?

- Crystal meth can be found as a white, yellowish or reddish powder, a waxy solid (glass) or a clear rock (ice).
- It is commonly called Tina, Crissy, crystal, bump, speed, or tweak.
- It can be swallowed, snorted, smoked, injected, or inserted anally (“booty bumping”).
- Crystal meth is a stimulant that triggers pleasure centers in the brain normally activated by the neurotransmitters norepinephrine and dopamine. During the 8-12 hours that crystal is active in a person’s system, he may experience increased alertness, decreased fatigue, lowered inhibitions, increased sex drive, and feelings of power, confidence and invulnerability.
- Following the high is a period of exhaustion, depression, irritability, and (sometimes) paranoia known as the “*crash*.”
- Crystal is extremely addictive. Many gay and bi men overestimate their ability to keep recreational use from escalating into dependence and addiction.
- Crystal addiction can be treated successfully with adequate peer support, mental health counseling, and professional substance abuse treatment services, both inpatient and outpatient, tailored for gay men and stimulants addiction. Treatment must be intensive, up to 24 months, structured for the individual, and address both psychological issues as well as chemical dependency.
- Nearly 60% of county officials reported that methamphetamine is the largest drug problem in their county in a survey released July 5, 2005.

Who is using crystal in Chicago?

- In Chicago, as with other urban areas, the population most impacted by crystal use appears to be gay men. In suburban and rural areas across the country and in Illinois, the use of crystal tends to be among heterosexual, blue-collar individuals.
- According to a study conducted by the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 1 in 10 Chicago gay men reported using crystal meth at least once in 2003, out of a sample of 1251 men. Nationally, 7 out of 1,000 adult males had used crystal at least once in the past year.
- About 20% of those who have used crystal in the past year are frequent users (using at least once a week).
- Ninety percent of gay men reported no crystal use in Chicago in 2003. The use of alcohol, powdered cocaine, and poppers is more common. Forty-four percent

reported using some type of illicit substance in the past year, compared to 17% among the general adult male population nationwide.

- Crystal use is most prevalent among gay men over the age of 30. Most of these men (94%) self-identify as gay.
- Crystal use is more prevalent among non-Hispanic Caucasians and Hispanic gay men than among African-American or Asian gay men.
- Meth users were almost 3 times more likely to be HIV -positive than non-users.

What is the connection between crystal and HIV and STDs?

- Crystal intoxication can result in risky sexual behavior.
- Physiological changes resulting from crystal use may increase infectivity (e.g., erosion of normal protective epithelial layer in the rectum.)
- In the CDPH study, crystal users in Chicago reported having over twice as many sex partners in 2003 as men who reported not using crystal during the same period.
- Crystal users reported engaging in unprotected receptive anal sex three times as often as men who had not used crystal in 2003.
- Sixty-six percent of HIV -negative crystal users reported having unprotected receptive anal sex in 2003.
- Crystal users reported testing for HIV and other STDs more often than other gay men engaging in high risk behavior but who are not using crystal.

Los Angeles data

- The percentage of gay male clients at the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center (LA Center) who reported using crystal meth nearly doubled from 2001 (5.8%) to 2004 (10.3%).
- In 2004, the percentage of gay male clients reporting crystal meth use who tested HIV -negative was 9.4%, up from 5.5% in 2001.
- In 2004, 30.2% of gay male clients who tested positive for HIV reported using crystal meth, up from 11.7% in 2001.

Sources:

1) Chicago HIV Behavioral Surveillance, Office of HIV/AIDS Surveillance, Chicago Department of Public Health, 2004. Data is based on 1,251 interviews.

2) Amezola De Herrera, Paula. *Amphetamine ('meth') Use Trends at the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center's HIV Counseling and Testing Program from 2001 to 2004*. Data is based on examination of 19,701 client records at the LA Center from 2001 to 2004.

3) Deconstructing Tina: A Compendium Guide to Crystal Meth Education and Support for Gay Men.