

# Methamphetamine: One of America’s Greatest Challenges

## Part II

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This publication examines the risk factors which may lead to meth use; the impacts it has on family, health, safety, environment and rural economic development; and simple strategies to combat this problem.

### Introduction

One of America’s and Nebraska’s greatest challenges is the drug epidemic, especially methamphetamine (commonly called meth). Nebraskans need to become more aware of the risk factors that might lead to abuse. Meth’s impact on individuals, family, health, safety, environment and rural economic development is a concern. To help protect families, neighbors and communities from dangers associated with meth, individuals, as part of a community plan or on their own, need to develop strategies. Citizens not only need education on the hazards of meth, but also are encouraged to take action against meth.

### Risk and Protective Factors

One of the most effective ways to prevent drug abuse is by focusing on youth. According to research from the National Center on Addiction & Substance Abuse, a person who can make it to age 21 without ever using drugs is more likely to never use them.

Hawkins and Catalano identified risk factors for youth in four domains of human interaction: family, individual/peers, school and community. Risk factors are those conditions or situations that increase the likelihood that a child will develop one or more health and/or behavior problems in adolescence, such as substance abuse or violence.

For each domain, risk factors which can increase youth’s chances for later drug use are:

#### Individual/peer:

- Associating with drug-abusing peers (the most immediate risk)
- Rebellious
- Viewing alcohol and drug use as normal behavior

#### Family:

- Lack of attachment and nurturing
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Ineffective parenting

#### School:

- Inappropriate classroom behavior
- Poor social skills
- Academic failure

#### Community:

- Availability of drugs
- Community laws and norms favorable to drug use

Youth who have a family history of substance abuse, are depressed, exhibit low self-esteem, and feel like they don’t fit in are more at risk for substance abuse.

Protective factors are positive influences in a young person’s life that lessen the risk factors when dealing with challenges of substance abuse. In each of the four domains, bonding is the most powerful protective factor. Bonding occurs when all three of the following elements are present in a person’s life:

- Positive social and relationship skills
- Opportunities for positive involvement
- Affirmative recognition

According to research, the major transition periods in a child’s life are key times when risk is higher. Major transition periods include leaving home for school, and changing from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to college or work. These transitions are when youth encounter new academic and social situations and a broader group of peers.

A National Institute on Drug Abuse article states that early abuse often includes substances such as tobacco, alcohol, inhalants, marijuana and prescription drugs (sleeping and

anti-anxiety pills). These often are called “gateway” drugs because if drug abuse persists into later adolescence, abusers become more heavily involved with other drugs.

With all of this in mind, some disturbing statistics should be considered. These statistics are from the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey that was given throughout the state to Nebraska students in the sixth, eighth, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. According to survey results, Nebraska ranks ninth in the nation for teenage binge drinking. The state ranks third nationally for teenagers reporting driving after drinking and third in the number of teenagers reporting riding with a drinking driver. Other eye opening statistics on Nebraska teenage drinking include the following:

- Twenty-four (24) percent report having their first drink prior to age 13.
- Forty-three (43) percent report currently using alcohol.
- Seventy (70) percent who drink have obtained alcohol from an adult (compared to 30 percent nationally).
- Thirty-eight (38) percent drank with an adult present.
- Twenty-one (21) percent drank at home with a parent’s permission.

### **Impacts**

Meth use and production affects many areas of society, including family, child neglect and abuse cases, emergency and health care systems, the environment, local law enforcement and budgets. Many of the impacts are inter-related and create a ripple effect on family, safety, health, environment and rural economic development.

**Family:** Producers and users of methamphetamine many times become so preoccupied with the drug that they neglect their family and children. Impacts on families can include:

- Increased anxiety, worry, depression and guilt
- Loss of productivity at work
- Loss of savings, home and/or retirement
- Loss of family member who is using meth
- Increase in domestic disputes

**Children:** Children of users often lack necessities such as food, water, shelter and proper medical care. They are at higher risk of:

- Physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- Delayed speech and language skills
- Hyperactivity and attention disorders
- Violent behavior
- Lack of boundaries/easy attachment to strangers
- Other developmental problems
- Substance abuse in later life

**Health & Safety:** Meth abuse is a threat to the health and safety of everyone. Health and safety issues include:

- Increase in health care costs
- Dangers of being exposed to toxic fumes
- Aggressive and violent behaviors by users
- Unsanitary conditions, stashes of drugs and weapons in user’s homes
- High risk of explosion and fire at meth production lab sites

**Environment:** Long after the manufacturer is gone, the poisonous toxic affects of a meth lab are still present. Concerns include:

- Potentially contaminated drinking water, soil and air from discarded toxic waste
- Contaminated porous materials (wall board, carpet, wallpaper, etc.) in homes of meth users and producers

**Rural Economic Development:** Substance abuse is a national problem. But like most issues, it is a problem that acutely affects rural communities economically. Communities might experience:

- Increased business costs due to theft of money and inventory
- Need for increased insurance and security
- Possible lack of a reliable labor pool
- Increase in crimes against businesses, family, friends and neighbors
- Increased need for additional law enforcement
- Increased caseload for legal system
- Increased taxes at the federal, state and local level to cover additional expenses

### **Strategies for Individuals and Communities to Fight Meth**

Individual communities are not alone in feeling the effects of meth abuse and production. The severe drug-related problems in many communities are getting attention, partially due to the face of the meth invasion, but also because families, youth, rural economics and law enforcement are involved. Citizens need to consider the quality of life that they desire to have in their communities and then do their part.

The goal is not simply to educate individuals on the hazards of using meth, but also to help protect them from the many other hazards posed by meth use and production and give them tools to help them rid their communities of meth.

Using the following steps develop a strategy to get individuals and community involved in fighting the problem of meth. Everyone must become part of the solution, because if they are not, then they are part of the problem.

The steps for planning strategies are:

1. Assess the situation
2. Identify priorities
3. Develop a plan
4. Implement a plan
5. Evaluate and reassess the situation

**Step I — Assess the situation** in your own life and community.

\_\_\_ Be a good role model:

Do you drink frequently or excessively?

Do you ride with a driver who has been drinking?

Do you drive after drinking?

Do you tolerate underage drinking in your home and community?

Do you supply alcohol to minors?

Do you overuse prescribed medications?

Do you use tobacco?

Do you use illegal drugs?

\_\_\_ Learn about your community values and norms:

How prevalent is drinking?

How prevalent is teen drinking?

How prevalent is smoking among youth and adults?

How prevalent is other drug use?

What law enforcement strategies are in place?

What alcohol and other drug-related programs are aimed toward youth (schools, churches, youth groups)?

What alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation is available?

What organizations address the meth issue?

**Step II — Identify the priorities** that need to be addressed from your assessments. As you set priorities, engage all segments of your community, including people of all ages, gender, and race, as well as public and private groups.

**Step III — Develop a work/action plan** using some of the strategies listed below, or determine your own strategies to fit your individual or community needs.

\_\_\_ Join a mentoring program or mentor a child on your own.

\_\_\_ Become involved in parenting programs.

\_\_\_ Encourage family-focused events in your community.

\_\_\_ Become involved and work with other community programs such as: civic clubs, community task forces, coalitions and so forth.

\_\_\_ Hold a neighborhood meeting to discuss what can be done in your neighborhood and invite law enforcement.

\_\_\_ Form a watch group(s) (such as a neighborhood watch, farm watch, community watch, house watch).

\_\_\_ Create walking or driving patrols.

\_\_\_ Record and report suspicious activities to local law enforcement or Nebraska State Patrol.

\_\_\_ Educate policy-makers on the dangers and pitfalls of meth and encourage legislation dealing with laws and policies related to the meth issue at local and state level.

\_\_\_ Encourage educational meetings related to meth to the following audiences: agricultural workers, roadside cleanup workers, retailers, public service employees, school faculty and staff, youth organizations, landlords, real estate personnel and the medical community.

\_\_\_ Conduct a community meth awareness forum (encourage youth and parents to attend).

\_\_\_ Hold a community drug action meeting. Consider inviting: local business owners, law enforcement, civic and social leaders, school personnel, ministerial association, local and state agencies, elected officials, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension personnel, judicial personnel and alcohol and drug abuse counselors. If a local coalition is not in place in your area, consider starting one with interested individuals and organizations.

\_\_\_ Create a community speakers bureau.

\_\_\_ Develop a community education and awareness campaign.

#### **Step IV — Implement the plan**

In order to implement many of the above strategies additional resources may be needed. Local law enforcement, health and human services offices, drug and alcohol counselors, plus many others can serve as valuable and reliable resources.

Design steps and a timeline for completing the plan. (What are you going to do and when will you have it finished?)

#### **Step V — Evaluate and reassess the situation**

1. What are we doing right and need to keep doing or do better?
2. What are we not doing that we should be doing?
3. What are we doing that we should not be doing?

#### **Conclusion**

By educating yourself about the hazards of meth, you already have taken the first step in your fight against meth in your community. Remember YOU are the most important part of your community's fight for safety. It's time to take back our communities; it's time for you to get involved.

Note: For more information on the history of methamphetamine, what it is, who uses it, and its effects see NebGuide G1748: Methamphetamine — One of America's Greatest Challenge — Part I.

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Nebraska State Patrol

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**Index: Safety & Health**  
**Drug/Alcohol Abuse**  
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