



spotlight on health

What Illicit Drugs Do To Your Teeth

(NAPSA)—There's a new effort under way to protect America's youth from the menace of drugs. Created by the American Dental Association (ADA), it focuses on the effects of methamphetamine not just on the user's life, but specifically on his or her teeth.

Methamphetamine is a powerfully addictive drug. It can lead to long-term neurological damage, but over the short term it can seriously damage oral health, destroying a person's smile and natural ability to chew, according to the ADA.

More than 12 million Americans have tried methamphetamine (also known as meth, crank, fluff, crystal, tina and speed), which can be swallowed, injected, snorted or smoked, according to the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. The majority of users range between 18 and 34 years of age.

Effects include paranoia, short term memory loss, rage and mood swings, as well as damage to the immune system. While researchers say it's not physically addictive, many users develop a very strong psychological and damaging dependence for the drug. Overdosing can lead to severe convulsions followed by circulatory and respiratory collapse, coma and death—users have died after taking small doses.

In addition, the chemicals used can cause damage to the teeth.



Methamphetamine can cause serious and permanent damage to your teeth, causing difficulty chewing and deteriorating your smile.

Meth users can go from having normal teeth to extremely damaged ones to eventual loss of them in about a year, warns the ADA. This condition is often called "meth mouth."

Kathleen Roth, D.D.S., explains, "The extensive tooth decay of 'meth' mouth is attributed to the drug's dry-mouth effect and its propensity to cause cravings for high-calorie carbonated beverages, tooth grinding and clenching, and extended periods of poor oral hygiene."

"The teeth of meth users can become blackened, stained and decayed," adds Dr. Roth. "Depending on the severity of the dental damage, extraction may be the only treatment option available."

"Very few people understand the broad dangers methamphetamine poses to the public health of

our communities in addition to meth users themselves," says Stephen Pasierb, president and CEO of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. "The ADA's warning should serve as a wake-up call to those who use this insidious drug as well as family and friends who are witness to this behavior. There is no safe level of meth use, but treatment and recovery are possible."

In an effort to highlight this condition, the ADA has posted educational materials on its Web site at www.ada.org for both dentists and patients, and just released a video in conjunction with the Partnership for a Drug-Free America that is available at www.drugfree.org/meth.

The not-for-profit ADA is the nation's largest dental association, representing more than 153,000 members. The premier source of oral health information, the ADA has advocated for the public's health and promoted the art and science of dentistry since 1859. The ADA's state-of-the-art research facilities develop and test dental products and materials that have advanced the practice of dentistry and made the patient experience more positive. The ADA Seal of Acceptance long has been a valuable and respected guide to consumer and professional products. For more information about the ADA, visit the Association's Web site at www.ada.org.