

Methamphetamine Use During Pregnancy

What is methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine, commonly known as “meth,” “crystal,” “crank,” “ice” and “speed” – is an illegal and dangerous drug that can be snorted, swallowed, smoked, injected or inhaled. A central nervous system stimulant, methamphetamine causes the brain to be flooded with dopamine, a chemical that stimulates pleasure.

The use of methamphetamine causes short- and long-term health effects, including stroke, irregular heart beat, heart damage, high blood pressure, stomach cramps, shaking, anxiety, insomnia, paranoia, and hallucinations. Continued use of methamphetamine will likely result in dependence on the drug.

What are the effects on babies during pregnancy and after birth?

Methamphetamine use during pregnancy affects development of a baby's:

- Brain
- Spinal Cord
- Heart
- Kidneys

- Methamphetamine use during pregnancy may result in prenatal complications, such as premature delivery and birth deformities.
- High doses of the drug may cause a baby's blood pressure to rise rapidly, leading them to suffer strokes or brain hemorrhages before birth.
- Babies whose mothers used methamphetamine during pregnancy may experience learning disabilities, growth and developmental delays.
- Methamphetamine-exposed babies may experience gastroschisis and other problems with the development of their intestines. (Gastroschisis is a condition in which a baby is born with a hole in the abdomen, causing the intestines to be outside the body.)

- Some babies may suffer developmental and skeletal abnormalities (such as clubfoot). Some babies are born without parts of their arms or legs.
- Because methamphetamine affects transmitters in the brain, babies often experience sleep disturbances and altered behavioral patterns. These babies have been described as "irritable babies."
- Full-term babies born to mothers who use methamphetamine will likely have difficulty sucking and swallowing, much like premature babies.
- Often babies born to meth-addicted women cannot tolerate stimuli such as human touch and light. These babies often display tremors and coordination problems.

What are the long-term effects?

The effects of methamphetamine use on brain development may last for many years. School-aged children whose mothers used methamphetamine while pregnant are more likely to be hyperactive or to have attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities and unprovoked fits of anger.