



# Methamphetamine in Montana:

A Follow-up Report on Trends and Progress

**April 2008**

**Montana Department of Justice**

Mike McGrath, Attorney General





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## A Follow-up Report on Trends and Progress April 2008

### Overview

In the January 2007 *Methamphetamine in Montana: A Preliminary Report on Trends and Impact*, the office of Montana Attorney General Mike McGrath looked at the societal and financial costs of meth use in the state, as well as the progress made in combating the drug.

This subsequent report summarizes key methamphetamine indicators and looks to identify continuing trends. As with the preliminary report, this 2008 follow up was prepared by collecting and analyzing available local law enforcement data, drug task force incident reports, crime lab toxicology reports, Montana survey results, national reports, state department records and interviews with participating agencies. Multiple years of data were examined to establish trends where data was available.

### Findings

- Teen meth use is declining. The 2007 *Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey*<sup>1</sup> reports that lifetime meth use by teenagers in Montana has dropped 44.6 percent since 2005. This decline is greater than any other observed across all risk categories measured by the survey.
- Meth-related treatment admissions to state-funded facilities are decreasing. Despite overall treatment populations remaining virtually unchanged in the period between 2005 and 2007, admissions for methamphetamine dropped 42 percent among patients 20 years old and under, and 24.5 percent for all patients.
- Meth-related crime is decreasing. Meth-related crime increased by 21 percent from 2004 to 2005, but dropped by 62 percent in the two-year period that followed through 2007. Additionally, the numbers of meth-positive probation/parolee violations continue a downward trend, indicating a sustained change.
- Progress is being made on meth's devastating social impacts. Meth accounted for 33 percent of all children in foster care, and over 50 percent of children in foster care for drug-related reasons in 2006. In 2007, these rates are both down 11 percent or, roughly, by 100 fewer children.
- Overall meth use appears to be declining. Workplace drug testing shows that the decline in frequency of workers testing positive for meth in Montana is well ahead of the national average. Montana's overall rate of employees testing positive for methamphetamine fell 72 percent between 2005 and 2007, compared to a 44 percent drop nationally.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1991, the Montana Office of Public Instruction has participated in the survey that was initiated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to identify the leading causes of mortality, morbidity and social problems among youth.

## Teen Meth Use

The Montana Meth Project's theoretical framework is based upon the prevention principles that individuals who believe that the use of a particular drug involves risk or harm and/or who disapprove of its use are less likely to use that drug.

As seen in last year's report, both the Montana Prevention Needs Assessment and the Meth Use & Attitudes Survey show that Montana teens perceive a much greater risk in trying meth than do their counterparts nationally. In theory, this should translate into reduced usage rates measured in the *Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (YRBS).

According to the YRBS, lifetime meth use by Montana teens decreased 44.6 percent between 2005 and 2007. This represents the largest decrease in teen meth use since the test began measuring this statistic in 1999. The YRBS assists educators and health professionals in determining the prevalence of health-risk behaviors as self-reported by Montana youth.

MT Youth Risk Behavior Survey Lifetime Meth Use Rates		
	Usage	% Change
1999	13.5	-
2001	12.6	-6.7%
2003	9.3	-26.2%
2005	8.3	-10.8%
2007	4.6	-44.6%

**Table 1. 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

### Attitudes

Two instruments are used to measure how young people view the risks associated with methamphetamine:

- The Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA) administered by the Department of Public Health and Human Services, surveys teens in the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades and measures risk and protective factors predictive of drug abuse.
- The Meth Use & Attitude Survey, commissioned by the Montana Meth Project in cooperation with the Montana Department of Justice, measures attitudes and beliefs held by teens, young adults and parents of teens.

In March 2006, the PNA expanded to include four specific questions regarding methamphetamine. The questions measure perceived risk and meth use in the past 30 days, past year and lifetime. The statewide annual survey also measures the age at which meth use begins. When asked about the risks of taking six different drugs, including alcohol, methamphetamine was perceived as the most dangerous; 93 percent of respondents saw using meth as having *great risk*. Montana teens' perception of risk is 10 percent higher than teen perception nationwide.

<b>Great Risk of Use, 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment</b>	
<b>Drug</b>	<b>% Perceiving Great Risk</b>
Daily Marijuana	59%
1 Pack + of Cigarettes	70.50%
Meth	93%

**Table 2. 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment**

According to the 2007 Montana Meth Use & Attitude Survey, nearly all Montana teens (84 percent), young adults (88 percent) and parents (96 percent) believe there is risk in taking meth just once or twice, and the majority believe there is “great” risk in doing so (65 percent, 70 percent and 94 percent, respectively).

Since 2005, the perception of specific negative effects resulting from meth use has changed. Among teens, risks such as stealing, lack of attention to personal hygiene, and tooth decay increased significantly (11 percent, 7.5 percent, and 19 percent respectively). In this time, societal disapproval of meth use has also greatly increased in the state, with teens (87 percent), young adults (83 percent) and parents (97percent) now voicing “strong” disapproval of trying meth even once or twice. Perhaps most importantly, parent-child discussions about the dangers posed by meth use have increased in number and frequency.

<b>Parent-Child Discussions About Meth Past Year as Reported by Mothers</b>		
	<b>2005</b>	<b>2007</b>
Ever	58%	66%
Once	21%	18%
> Once	36%	49%
Never	42%	34%

**Table 3. Parent-Child Discussions About Meth**

## **Supply**

Quantitative data and the experience of state and local law enforcement agencies suggest that methamphetamine availability may be shifting. Meth-related seizures, arrests and clandestine labs are declining.

Anecdotal information reported by the state’s drug task forces and the Division of Criminal Investigation points to the availability of meth remaining relatively stable. Availability of the meth produced in small domestic labs declined dramatically in recent years, and was replaced by high quality, high potency crystal meth, known as “ice,” brought into Montana by interstate and international drug trafficking organizations.

Meth prices have leveled off as well. The increase in price a couple of years ago corresponded to the decrease in local meth labs. With the large quantities of meth being brought into Montana, supply is again catching up with demand and prices have come back down and leveled off at about what they have been for the past 10 years.

The resurgence in cocaine’s popularity has continued in recent years. The price of cocaine is about the same as meth and, even though the “high” from coke is significantly less intense than that associated with meth, cocaine is now viewed as a much safer drug. The meth-lab boom of the late 90s destroyed the cocaine business in many states, including Montana. That trend has now reversed.

“As a direct result of the public education/awareness efforts regarding meth in the state, I doubt there is a dope addict in Montana who isn’t aware of the downsides to meth use.”  
 Division of Criminal Investigation agent

Meth Labs

In July 2005, Montana enacted strict precursor control laws, which put cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine behind pharmacy counters. Better controls on the ingredients needed to make meth have contributed to the steady decline in the number of clandestine meth labs in Montana:

- In federal fiscal year 2002, the number of meth labs that required the removal of hazardous materials by a specialized contractor peaked at 122.
- In FFY 2007, 7 labs were seized in Montana.

<b>Meth Labs Reported by Drug Task Forces, 2001-2007</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Labs</b>	<b>% Change</b>
2001	86	-
2002	122	41.9%
2003	89	-27.0%
2004	64	-28.1%
2005	25	-60.9%
2006	8	-68.0%
2007	7	-12.5%

**Table 4. Meth Lab Trends**

Meth Seizures

The Montana Board of Crime Control collects data from local jurisdictions and drug task forces using the Montana Incident Based Report (MTIBR). According to MTIBR data, methamphetamine seizures increased steadily between 2002 and 2005, and then began to drop significantly in 2006. The decrease from 2005 to 2007 represents a 59 percent reduction.

<b>Incidents Where Meth Was Seized in Montana</b>	
Year	Incidents
2002	160
2003	352
2004	488
2005	601
2006	344
2007	245

**Table 5. Law Enforcement Meth Seizures**

## **Meth Use**

Data measuring meth use supports the positive influence of increased public awareness and dialogue.

### Treatment Admissions

The number of addicts who cited meth as their primary drug of choice declined nearly 34 percent in the period between 2006 and 2007. During the same period, overall drug treatment admissions rose slightly. For patients 20 years of age and younger, admissions for those citing meth as their drug choice dropped by an even greater percentage, 42 percent.

<b>Montana Drug Treatment Admissions (unduplicated)</b>			
Year	Meth	Other	% of Total
2005	1,011	5,701	15.06%
2006	1,140	5,900	19.93%
2007	769	5,993	12.83%
% Change 06-07	-32.54%	1.58%	-35.62%

**Table 7. Meth Addicts Admitted to State Treatment Programs**

### Workplace Drug Testing Results for 2005 through 2007

According to the semi-annual Drug Testing Index, Montana outpaced the nation in the declining frequency of workers testing positive for meth.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the number of workers tested is relatively small, so it is possible that the trends may be less dramatic than they appear.

- Montana's overall rate of employees testing positive for methamphetamines fell 72 percent between 2005 and 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The Drug Testing Index, published by Quest Diagnostics as a public service for government, media and industry, has been considered a benchmark for national trends since its inception in 1988.

<b>Meth-Positive Tests in the Workplace</b>				
STATE	2005	2007	Change	% Change
Montana	0.71	0.20	0.51	-72%
NATIONAL	0.18	0.10	.08	-44%

**Table 6. Meth-Positive Workplace Tests for 2005 to 2007**

## Crime

In the last two years, local law enforcement agencies report a decline in the number of crime incidents in which meth was involved. Since 2005, methamphetamine seizures by law enforcement agencies have decreased by 59 percent. Meth-positive crime toxicology tests in all categories decreased by 47 percent from 2005 to 2007. Finally, Montana saw a 62 percent reduction in meth-positive arrests from 2005 to 2007. Meth-related crime has decreased remarkably during the last two years in Montana.

According to the Incident Based Crime Report (IBC)<sup>3</sup>, overall crime rates have remained relatively steady in recent years. Meanwhile, meth-related crime:

- increased by 17 percent between 2004 and 2005, but
- declined by 62 percent between 2005 and 2007.

IBC also tracks a specific drug offense subcategory, defined as violations of laws prohibiting the production, distribution or use of certain controlled substances and the equipment or devices used in their preparation or use. Crimes in this category in which meth was identified dropped by 62 percent between 2005 and 2007; a figure that mirrors the decrease seen in the broader meth-positive arrests category.

<b>MT Incident Based Reports</b>	
<b>Total Meth-Related Offenses</b>	
2004	1,043
2005	1,259
2006	735
2007	473
<b>Total Meth-Related Drug Offenses</b>	
2004	544
2005	655
2006	311
2007	251

**Table 8. Meth-Related Crime Trends**

<sup>3</sup> The Incident Based Crime Report (IBC) is compiled by the Montana Board of Crime Control. The arresting officer determines related factors, including whether a crime is associated with drugs, the type of drugs involved and whether the criminal is under the influence.

Forensic Science Division Toxicology and Chemistry Reports

The state crime lab provides scientific and technical support to Montana’s law enforcement community. The drug chemistry specialists analyze samples of dangerous drugs discovered at crime scenes. The number of cases in which methamphetamine was found decreased from 70 percent in 2005 to 49 percent in 2006, a 30 percent drop. In 2007, this trend continued with a further 28 percent decrease observed in meth-positive findings.

<b>MT State Crime Lab Chemistry Analysis Cases Identified as Meth</b>				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
% Identified as Meth	65.3%	69.8%	48.8%	37.9%

**Table 9. State Crime Lab Cases in which Meth was Identified**

Toxicologists analyze biological samples (blood, urine and tissue) to determine the presence of drugs in crimes, the cause of death in autopsies, and to check for evidence of drug use by people on parole and probation. Meth-positive toxicology tests in all categories dropped from 18.5 percent in 2004 to 8.8 percent in 2007, a 52 percent decrease.

<b>Montana State Crime Lab Meth-Positive Percentage of All Toxicology Tests</b>	
Year	Percent
2004	18.5%
2005	16.7%
2006	10.5%
2007	8.8%

**Table 10. State Crime Lab Toxicology Tests that Identified Meth Use**

Toxicology test data also indicates a substantial decrease in sale of meth and meth use associated with probation/parolee violations in the past two years. Importantly, the number of arrests for meth possession, possession with intent to sell, and sale have dropped convincingly and maintained lower levels.

<b>Montana State Crime Lab Percentage of Meth-Positive Toxicology Tests by Category</b>				
	Possession	Sales	Urinalysis	Ag. Assault
2004	8	8	536	3
2005	23	4	473	1
2006	3	0	354	0
2007	5	0	276	0

**Table 11. Toxicology Results for Drug-related Offenses**

## Impact on Children

In 2005 it was estimated that over half of the children in out-of-home foster care in the state of Montana were there due to meth-related neglect or abuse. Victims of a situation they are most likely too young to understand, these children's worlds are turned upside down. Not only are the emotional impacts devastating, but the costs of the average out-of-home placement are extraordinary as well.

In 2006, progress was seen when meth-related out-of-home placements dropped to under 33 percent of all cases. However, meth was still cited in over half of all drug-related cases. In 2007, this number dropped 19 percent, to 26.4 percent of all cases.

MT Department of Health and Human Services Meth-related Out-of-Home Placements		
	%	% Change
2005	53.0%	-
2006	32.6%	-38.5%
2007	26.4%	-19.0%

**Table 12. Meth-related Foster Care Placements**

## Social and Economic Impact

Despite the positive trends outlined above, meth continues to negatively affect the state, particularly in the direct costs of social and correctional services. The additional secondary social, health care, unemployment and workers' compensation costs, and losses in employee productivity, likely more than double the direct costs to the state's human service providers.

Consider these figures:

- 26 percent of the parents of children in out-of-home foster care have lost custody of their children due to meth-related abuse. Cost to the state: nearly \$6 million annually. However, just two years ago this cost was over \$12 million dollars.
- 50 percent of Montana's adult inmates are incarcerated due to meth-related crimes. Cost to the state: between \$18,000 and \$29,000 a year per inmate. The Department of Corrections spends approximately \$85 million a year for adult secure custody.
- 11.4 percent of all patients in treatment in Montana report meth as their primary drug of choice. Cost to the state: \$5.7 million annually. In 2005, nearly twice this amount was being spent on methamphetamine treatment.

## Summary

Data collected in 2007 indicates that programs recently initiated in Montana have built upon success observed in the previous year, and are continuing to have a significant impact on the state's methamphetamine problem. New initiatives to reduce demand for the drug by raising awareness about the negative consequences of methamphetamine use have dramatically changed attitudes toward the drug. Montana's strict precursor control laws, also enacted in 2005, have reduced the number of clandestine labs in the state. Montana's approach – dedicating significant resources to both prevention and enforcement – is making a difference. The state has made dramatic progress in a number of key areas, and has made gains not seen in most other states.

While 2006 data was preliminary, newer evidence available clearly demonstrates that the prevention campaign started in 2005 by the Montana Meth Project has had a positive and sustained impact on Montana. Critical indicators point to reductions in meth use, related crime and to a growing perception of the great risk associated with using this drug.

Combined with other enforcement, treatment and prevention efforts, the Montana Meth Project's education campaign has had dramatically positive results. Virtually all Montana citizens are aware of the dangers posed by meth. Early results show that drug use behavior has been altered in the short term.

Ongoing efforts on the part of federal, state and local law enforcement to make the drug less available in Montana will continue to be a priority. However, continuing to execute aggressive prevention and education programs is critical to our efforts to eradicate Montana's methamphetamine problem. By systematically focusing on demand reduction, we will continue to set the pace for the rest of the nation in addressing this epidemic.

With the continued educational and prevention efforts of the Montana Meth Project, it is logical to conclude that meth use will continue to decline and, subsequently, countless new users will be diverted from meth addiction.

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