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## **Alaska methamphetamine-related deaths surge fourfold**

November 7, 2017 (Anchorage, AK) — In the midst of a nationwide opioid epidemic, Alaska is one of several states seeing a surge in methamphetamine use and methamphetamine-related deaths. The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services' Section of Epidemiology released a [report](#) today on the health impacts of methamphetamine use in Alaska.

Alaska experienced a fourfold increase in methamphetamine-related mortality from 1.4 per 100,000 persons during 2008–2010 to 5.8 per 100,000 persons during 2014–2016. Rates were highest among people aged 45–54 years and among people living in the Gulf Coast, Southeast, and Interior regions of the state. Methamphetamine-related deaths affected all regions, races, and age groups in Alaska.

The rate at which Alaskans sought hospital care for amphetamine poisoning (including methamphetamine) during 2015 and 2016 increased nearly 40 percent. Rates were highest in Anchorage (18.2 per 100,000 persons), followed by the Northern (14.4), Matanuska-Susitna (13.8), and Gulf Coast (9.3) regions. The total inpatient cost associated with amphetamine poisoning during 2015 and 2016 exceeded \$5.3 million.

Amphetamines (including methamphetamine) are commonly used in combination with other drugs, such as alcohol, benzodiazepines, cocaine, and heroin and other opioids. Of the 200 hospital discharge records identified in 2015 and 2016, 33 percent indicated use of amphetamines plus at least one additional drug, and 78 percent of amphetamine overdoses during 2008–2016 also involved at least one other substances.

“Adverse health effects of methamphetamine use are increasing, and a considerable number of people who overdose on this drug are also using other substances,” said Dr. Jay Butler, Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health. “It is important for state, local, and private

agencies to collaborate when we are addressing substance misuse in Alaska. We need to be taking a coordinated, cooperative approach to this larger issue.”

Methamphetamine use among Alaska youth has dropped slightly in the past decade; however, use varied dramatically by school setting, with correctional facilities having the highest percentage of student-reported methamphetamine use (28.6 percent), and traditional high schools having the lowest (3.3 percent).

Chronic methamphetamine use can lead to extreme weight loss, severe dental problems (often called “meth mouth”), anxiety, hallucinations, and violent behavior. Methamphetamine reduces inhibitions and impairs judgement, making users more susceptible to risky sexual activity and exposure to HIV, viral hepatitis, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Users who inject the drug intravenously are at increased risk of contracting blood borne pathogens.

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Read the entire report: “[Health Impacts of Methamphetamine Use in Alaska](#)”