

Media Statement

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Mackay HHS feels impact of ice on community

Mackay Hospital and Health Service is dealing with increasing numbers of people affected by methamphetamines.

Clinicians working in mental health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Service and in the Emergency Department at Mackay Base Hospital treat up to six people a day for ice related problems.

While some are treated specifically for methamphetamine poisoning there are other presentations where ice is a contributing factor such as psychosis and physical injury.

Director of Emergency director Dr Pieter Nel said the numbers seen varied according to the toxicity of the batch in circulation.

“We are aware of at least one death caused by ice in the past month and there have been others acutely unwell after using the drug,” Dr Nel said.

“Ice puts a massive strain on the body. We see people with incredibly fast heart beats, rapid breathing, sweating and shaking. The resulting heart attack or brain bleed can be fatal.”

Since 1 July 2014 there have been 31 cases of methamphetamine poisoning treated in Emergency, up from 27 the year before.

Typical ice presentations are:

- Psychosis where users have hallucinations. They're agitated, paranoid, restless, afraid to go to sleep, aggressive and difficult to restrain due to their strength.
- Staph infection from sores caused by using the drug. Users often pick at the sores because they hallucinate about insects crawling under their skin. Staph can also enter the blood stream from the surface of the skin if they are injecting ice. This can be fatal.
- Multi-organ failure. Ice causes abnormal heart rhythms that can cause sudden and high blood pressure that causes a stroke.

Dr Nel said treatment was generally sedation to manage the breathing and keep people hydrated.

“Ice users can be very dangerous, the drug heightens their strength and stamina and they often requires a large amount of sedation to intubate them,” he said.

“We are seeing males and females of all ages, and it is not uncommon to see people in their 40s-60s. There is no main user demographic.”

Division of Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Nursing Director Donna Leary said a growing number of people were seeking help for ice addiction.

“Ice is often part of the bigger picture. People are not necessarily coming to us because they are addicted to ice but it’s there in the context of mental health issues and relationship breakdowns,” she said.

Anyone seeking support to stop using drugs should call AODS for free confidential counselling and support on 4968 3858.

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