

Crystal meth drug increase worries health officials

Health and social service providers in Halton say they expect to see an increase in the rate local residents are using the dangerous illegal drug crystal meth.

This is one of the findings of a recent informal scan conducted by the Region's public health nurses to determine the scope of crystal meth—formally called crystal methamphetamine—use in Halton, resulting from a concern raised at a recent regional committee meeting and the media attention the drug has received lately.

Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal reported to the health and social services committee recently that the majority of professionals questioned currently aren't seeing much crystal meth use in the region, but there's a general feeling that they expect an increase.

He said he thinks this sentiment is largely based on what these individuals are hearing and seeing from their counterparts in Hamilton and Toronto, since trends usually spread.

"If things (trends) happen in the GTA, they tend to start in the bigger centres," Dr. Nosal said.

Nurses consulted with school staff, addictions treatment staff, community youth workers, emergency room staff, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association and relevant Regional program staff to gather the information.

The informal survey found that service providers in Oakville who work with high-risk youth are sensing an increase in crystal meth use.

And throughout Halton, Dr. Nosal's report said, "Concern was noted for youth that attend raves, homeless youth and the gay population related to higher rates of use."

Users were said to be typically those over 16 who use multiple substances.

The professionals questioned also said they're troubled with the increased rate local teens are using cannabis, crack and cocaine.

Crystal meth is a crystalline form of methamphetamine—which was

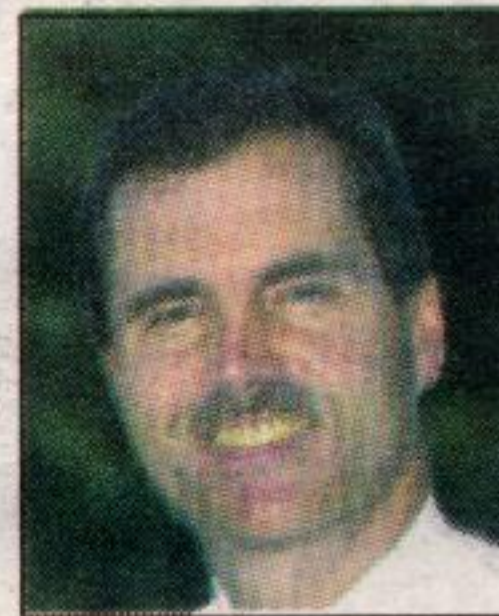
He noted crystal meth has become a big problem in communities throughout the United States, and there've also been significant reports of its use in rural Ontario.

While the health department doesn't have any current numbers related to the rate crystal meth is used locally, a Halton Student Drug Use Survey that was conducted in 1999 showed 1.2 per cent of students had used the drug in the past year.

This was pretty much on par with the findings in the Ontario Student

'This (drug) is something you do not want to get into. It causes real problems.'

—Dr. Robert Nosal,
Halton Medical Officer of Health



originally used in nasal decongestants and bronchial inhalers—and is usually smoked in a pipe like crack cocaine.

Nosal said the big problems with crystal meth are that it's not all that expensive, gives "an immediate rush" and creates a quick addiction. He added tolerance to the drug is also built up quickly, making it necessary to take higher doses to achieve the same effects.

An overdose of the drug can lead to a seizure, heart attack, stroke or even death.

"This (drug) is something you do not want to get into. It causes real problems," Nosal said.

Drug Use Survey from the same year, which said 1.4 per cent of youths across the province used the drug. The 2003 survey saw that number drop slightly to 1.2 per cent.

While Dr. Nosal said clearly the health department would prefer that youths don't use any drugs, he highlighted the positive in the low numbers seen in the surveys.

"We just want to make sure it doesn't get higher," he said.

Another Ontario survey is set to be released in November and will be reviewed by Regional staff for local trends.

—By Melanie Hennessey, special

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