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NSW Police Force

METHYLAMPHETAMINE, MDMA AND OTHER STIMULANT DRUGS

FACT SHEET FOR POLICE

STATE CRIME COMMAND

Summary

- This fact sheet aims to provide members of the NSW Police Force with background information about illicit stimulants and the things to be aware of when responding to people affected by this class of drugs.
- Both in Australia and overseas, the three main illicit stimulants available are methylamphetamine (also known as methamphetamine), MDMA, and cocaine.
- People under the influence of stimulants may exhibit a range of symptoms. The symptoms experienced and their intensity will depend on several factors, including the dose taken, co-ingestion, ambient temperature, and the person's physical and psychological characteristics. The dose consumed is determined by the purity of the drug and the amount consumed.
- The most common mental health problems that arise in association with stimulant use are psychosis, anxiety, depression; and/or paranoia.
- There may be situations where urgent medical assistance is required for a person who appears to be affected by methylamphetamine or other stimulant drugs.
- If a person appears to need medical attention (from agitation requiring physical restraint, seizures, hyperthermia, loss of consciousness or cardiac arrest), call an ambulance immediately.

Document Control Sheet

Document Properties

Title	Methylamphetamine, MDMA and other stimulant drugs: fact sheet for police
Subject	Information on methylamphetamine, MDMA and other stimulant drugs
Command responsible	State Crime Command
Authorisation	Assistant Commissioner – State Crime Command
Security Classification	OFFICIAL
Publication date	April 2024
Current version number	2.0
Review date	April 2027
Document RMS number	D/2024/394520
Linked RMS folder	D/2024/346228
Copyright statement	© Crown in right of NSW through NSW Police Force 2024
Suitable for Public Disclosure	YES

Modification History

Version #	Version creation date	Author / Position	Summary of changes
1	02/2022	Capability, Performance and Youth Command	Original document – replaced the Guidelines for the Management of People Affected by Methylamphetamine and Other Stimulant Drugs (D/2021/1180661)
2	03/2024	Crime Prevention Command	Update of guidelines to reflect Corporate Procedures template

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide police with background information about illicit stimulants and the things to be aware of when responding to people affected by this class of drugs.

Note: this document does not contain operational guidance for police (such as custody management, transportation, and tactical options). Officers should refer to the relevant SOPs, training, NSW Police Force Handbook and/or other protocols for operational guidance.

Most situations involving people affected by stimulants (also known as ‘psychostimulants’) will be relatively straightforward for police. Many will involve routine drug detections and other types of incidents where the person is reasonably compliant.

At times though, some people affected by stimulants can be aggressive, agitated, confused or paranoid, and may be very difficult to manage. People experiencing such symptoms may not respond to communication techniques that normally ‘de-escalate’ a difficult situation, and may also be unresponsive to other tactical options.

Scope

This document is provided for the information and guidance of all NSW Police Force officers.

Roles & responsibilities

Assistant Commissioner – State Crime Command	Document approval
Commander – Drug & Firearms Squad	Document sponsor
Commander – Drug & Firearms Squad	Document owner
Drugs, Alcohol & Mental Health Team – Crime Prevention Command	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review these procedures prior to the scheduled review date and ensure content remains up to dateSupport sworn staff by answering queries relating to these guidelines as they arise
All Sworn staff	Are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this information and follow this guidance when dealing with individuals affected by stimulants

Guidelines

What are Stimulants?

Both in Australia and overseas, the three main illicit stimulants available are **methylamphetamine (also known as methamphetamine), MDMA, and cocaine**. These drugs speed up the messages to the brain, increasing the heart and breathing rate. Although police will sometimes encounter escalated situations involving people under the influence of MDMA or cocaine, the majority of escalated situations involving stimulants will be associated with methylamphetamine use.

People with MDMA or cocaine intoxication can present with similar features to methamphetamine intoxication. Methylamphetamine comes in a variety of forms including powder ('speed', 'goey'), tablet, paste ('base') and crystalline methylamphetamine ('ice', 'crystal', 'shabu', 'tina', 'glass'). Methylamphetamine can be smoked, swallowed, snorted, injected, or inserted anally (shafting). Amongst those who use crystalline methylamphetamine (ice), smoking is the most common route of administration, followed by injecting.

The Effects of Stimulants

People under the influence of stimulants may exhibit a range of symptoms, including:

- increased energy including unusual or unexpected strength;
- talkativeness
- an intense feeling of euphoria
- increased self-confidence and sense of powerfulness (this contributes to aggression)
- restlessness
- agitation
- anxiety
- paranoia
- hallucinations
- agitated delirium (delirium, psychomotor agitation and physiologic excitation);
- inappropriate removal of clothing
- pacing
- making purposeless movements
- teeth grinding
- skin picking (often resulting in small scabs)
- having elevated body temperature (hyperthermia)/warm skin
- sweating
- tremors/shaking
- having dilated/large pupils
- seizures
- loss of consciousness; and/or
- cardiac arrest

The symptoms experienced and their intensity will depend on several factors, including the dose taken, co-ingestion, ambient temperature, and the person's physical and psychological characteristics. The dose consumed is determined by the purity of the drug and the amount consumed.

Stimulant Use and Mental Health

Most people who use stimulants will not experience any mental health problems, but some people do. For example, some people will experience mental health and behavioural responses such as agitation and aggression while others will not. Someone with a mental illness (like schizophrenia) is more at risk of experiencing mental health problems in association with stimulant use.

The most common mental health problems that arise in association with stimulant use are: **psychosis, anxiety, depression; and/or paranoia.**

About one in three people who regularly use methylamphetamine report experiencing psychosis at least once in their lifetime¹.

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Psychosis brought on by drug use (known as 'drug-induced psychosis') is a temporary condition which usually lasts from hours up to several days or lasts anywhere up to weeks in chronic users. Common symptoms include hallucinations, delusional thoughts, and a belief of being persecuted².

When a person affected by stimulants is also experiencing mental health problems, the situation may be difficult to manage. It's important to remember that:

- the person may not be complying with your instructions because he/she may not be hearing or understanding what is being said,
- the person may find an approaching police officer particularly threatening as it may elicit thoughts of 'they are out to get me'.

Things to be Aware of When Responding to People Affected by Stimulants

- Stimulants (particularly methylamphetamine) can cause adrenaline to release in large doses, meaning that people under its influence can show unexpected levels of strength and/or an increased motivation to fight.
- If the person has experienced a large release of adrenaline, he/she may not be able to feel pain and as a consequence, may be unaware that they are injured.
- Stimulants can cause body temperature, heart rate or blood pressure to rise to dangerous/life threatening levels.
- Stimulants can increase the risk of dehydration.
- Although very rare, it is possible to die from water intoxication whilst under the influence of MDMA. The reason why someone might drink too much water is likely a combination of being hot, being dehydrated, having more physical exertion and a direct effect of the MDMA.
- People under the influence of stimulants are at high risk for agitated delirium.
- Prolonged physical restraint should be avoided as it may precipitate cardiac arrest in a patient with agitated delirium.
- The cause of death in people who are intoxicated with stimulants includes physical accidents, seizures, cardiac arrest, and hyperthermia resulting in multi-organ failure.
- Any of the symptoms above can be caused by other medical conditions, so be mindful that another health condition may be causing their behaviours.

Medical Assistance

It is important for police to be aware that there may be situations where urgent medical assistance is required for a person who appears to be affected by methylamphetamine or other stimulant drugs.

Stimulant drugs speed up the heart and breathing rate, cause very high blood pressure, and can increase the risk of hyperthermia from elevating the person's temperature. Further information is available on the NSW Health website - [Pre-hospital guideline: Illicit substance-induced hyperthermia - Alcohol and other drugs \(nsw.gov.au\)](#).

If a person appears to need medical attention (from agitation requiring physical restraint, seizures, hyperthermia, loss of consciousness or cardiac arrest), call an ambulance immediately.

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For more information, including treatment options, visit **'Your Room'** - a place to get facts about alcohol and other drugs and learn more about some of the most commonly used drugs by Australians right now.

Endnote References

1. Bramness, J. & Rognli, E. (2016). Psychosis induced by amphetamines. *Current Opinions in Psychiatry*, 29(4).

2. People who use stimulants are approximately 11 times more likely to experience psychosis than the general population, according to:

McKetin, R., Kelly, E. & McLaren, J. (2006). The relationship between crystalline methamphetamine use and methamphetamine dependence. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 85(3), pp. 198–204.