

# Cox News Service

## Teens say they have easy access to meth

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By: Whitney Boyd / Cox News Service

Most teens find it easy to access methamphetamine and of those who have tried it, more than 75 percent said they started when they were age 15 or younger, a survey released Tuesday found.

The Meth Project, a nonprofit organization based in California, surveyed more than 2,000 junior and senior high school students throughout the United States earlier this year on their attitudes toward methamphetamine. It found that teens' perceptions of the drug could put a significant number of them at risk of using it.

The organization said it conducted the survey after it noticed a significant drop in methamphetamine use in Montana after it ran thousands of anti-meth advertisements catered toward teenage viewers. Since the launch of The Meth Project's Montana ad campaign in 2005, meth use among teens in Montana dropped in half, while other states remained the same, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Despite Montana's high success rate, the survey's results reflect growing concerns among law enforcement officials about an influx in meth use among teens, women and minorities. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration latest survey on high school meth users, the number of teen users increased almost 20 percent from 2004 to 2005. In 2005, 6.2 percent of high school students reported using methamphetamine at some point in their lifetime.

One in ten teens who participated in The Meth Project's survey said that someone has offered them meth at some point in their lives. And one in three said they see little to no risk in trying meth once.

"Teens are not seeing a problem with trying this drug, and we need to make it a nationwide issue," Thomas Siebel, chairman and founder of the Meth Project, said. He is pushing for mandatory nationwide anti-meth campaign ads focused strictly on younger audiences.

State officials have made several initiatives to curb the growing number of new meth users. Since April 2004, 44 states have restricted retail sales of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, chemicals found in most cold medicines used to create home-based meth. Products such as Iodine crystals, denatured alcohol, Coleman's Fuel, Red Devil Lye, Muriatic Acid (used to clean brick and metals), acetone (the flammable ingredient in nail polish remover) and Methanol can also be used in the process.

These restrictions complement existing federal controls over wholesale chemical precursor sales, including new legislation passed last September as part of the USA Patriot Act.

In 2005, the Texas legislature passed its own restrictions limiting access to certain cold medicines by putting them behind drug store counters. Stores also were required to identify and record individuals who buy certain meth-based products - making it harder for teens to access the drug. But even with the tough restrictions, teens still say they have ready access to meth.

Tom Vinger, a spokesman for the Texas Department of Public Safety, said the law helped to eliminate some of the state's home-grown labs. But he added: "There has been an influx of younger users and trafficking from Mexico."

According to the DEA, availability of meth remains high in north Texas and Mexican-manufactured meth now dominates the market in the Dallas. In 2005, DEA branches in Texas seized about 2,139 pounds of meth, 44 percent more than in 2004.

Meth also continued a four-year trend as metro Atlanta's fastest growing drug problem, despite its ban since 2005 of over-the-counter products containing pseudoephedrine. Georgia is also a central hub for trafficking meth from Miami to New York City, according to Georgia DEA branches.

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been actively working with law enforcement partners in Mexico to combat meth smuggling into the United States, said Matthew Allen, ICE's deputy assistant director for narcotics, at a Senate hearing Tuesday.