



MEDIA RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE USE
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DENTISTS FEAR 'DECAY EPIDEMIC' FROM DRUG USE

Dentists today warned a growing number of young Australians are putting their long-term oral health at risk from amphetamine and other drug use. This is a trend that could lead to a decay epidemic.

The warning follows a report* issued by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre last week that found 12% of 24 year olds in Australia had used amphetamines in the last 12 months.

The report also found the likelihood of them using amphetamines was heightened by previous use of other drugs such as alcohol, cannabis and tobacco, factors that would further decay teeth and gums and compound any damage caused by subsequent amphetamine use.

The catastrophic effects of regular methamphetamine use on oral health has led to the term 'meth mouth' being coined by some practitioners and health experts.

Regular use of methamphetamine causes rapid decay in oral health. As well as being unsightly the decay can be so severe that all the teeth need to be removed and full dentures made.

Australian Dental Association (SA Branch) President Dr. Mark Hutton said, "Young people need to be aware of the long-term damage that drug use can cause to teeth. This damage frequently leads to extractions."

"Alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs are a lethal cocktail for teeth and gums."

Several factors contribute to increased oral decay rates among drug users:

- The often acidic nature of some drugs
- The drugs 'dry mouth' effect. Without saliva present to protect teeth the decay can progress very rapidly
- The tendency to crave fizzy, acidic and often sugary drinks
- Anxiety that leads to tooth grinding and clenching

The report, conducted over 10 years, showed that the more commonly used drugs of alcohol, cannabis and tobacco were the strongest predictors of amphetamine use in the age group (14 – 24 year olds).

“Tobacco, alcohol and cannabis are extremely damaging to teeth and gums and cause discolouring, decay, periodontal (gum) disease and tooth loss,” says Dr. Hutton.

The ADA recommends that people avoid teeth and gum decay by:

- Not using illicit drugs or smoking
- Not drinking alcohol (or drinking alcohol in moderation)
- Consuming water (fluoridated if possible) rather than fizzy drinks
- Regularly brushing with fluoridated toothpaste, flossing and using a mouth rinse
- Regularly visiting their dentist

In conjunction with the spike in drug use, recent reports suggest that only 53 per cent of 15 - 24 year olds visited a dentist in the last 12-months.

“With the increase in drug use in this age group and a lack of regular dentist check ups in this age group it’s fair to say that we have a serious problem,” says Dr. Hutton.

“This age group may believe their teeth and gums are healthy because they look all right now but this does not mean that they will be healthy in the long term.

Care for your teeth and gums must start at an early age and continue throughout life.

There is no room for drug use, a poor track record when it comes to check ups or lack lustre care at home.”

This week is National Dental Health Week.

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** Who are the new amphetamine users?
A 10-year prospective study of young Australians.
National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre*