

Methamphetamine Supply in Australia

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Most of the methamphetamine available in Australia is produced domestically in clandestine chemical laboratories or 'clan labs'. Domestically produced methamphetamine is usually marketed on the street as a powder called 'speed', which is heavily cut with glucose, or as a less adulterated damp/oily powder or paste, which is sold as 'base' methamphetamine.

Australia has seen the introduction of imported crystalline methamphetamine over the past five years. Crystalline methamphetamine is also manufactured in clandestine drug laboratories in Australia, and is a highly purified form of the drug that is recognisable by its translucent crystalline appearance. Crystalline methamphetamine is sold on the street as 'crystal meth' or 'ice'.

Methamphetamine is also pressed into pills. These pills are usually sold as ecstasy, and producers often combine methamphetamine with ketamine in pills to give an ecstasy-like drug effect. Although methamphetamine pills are also common within Southeast and East Asia (e.g., 'ya ba' in Thailand), there is little evidence that these pills are imported into Australia.

Importation of crystalline methamphetamine

Large shipments of crystalline methamphetamine were first detected at the Australian border in 2000. Most large-scale crystalline methamphetamine detections have originated from China, although some were transhipped through other countries in the Asia Pacific region. These detections were similar to large-scale shipments of heroin detected at the Australian border, in that they were concealed in cargo and were bound for cities on the east coast of Australia.

Crystalline methamphetamine manufacture in Australia

Although it is generally believed that most of the crystalline methamphetamine available in Australia is imported, there have been a couple of clandestine laboratory seizures within Australia that involved crystalline methamphetamine manufacture. Reports from crystalline methamphetamine dealers similarly suggest domestic manufacture of crystalline methamphetamine, although it is not clear to what extent this is occurring.

Methamphetamine production

Methamphetamine manufacturing methods found in Australia include:

- hypophosphorous method (using hypophorous acid and iodine)
- red phosphorus method (using hydriodic acid and red phosphorus)
- 'Nazi' method (using lithium or sodium with anhydrous ammonia)
- P2P or Leuckart method (using P2P, which is also called phenylacetone or benzyl methyl ketone, together with formic acid or aluminium amalgam)

Producing crystalline methamphetamine involves further refining of methamphetamine produced through conventional techniques, such as those noted above.

Pseudoephedrine is the main precursor chemical used to make methamphetamine in Australia, which is usually obtained from over-the-counter cold and flu preparations (e.g., [®]Sudafed, [®]Codral). Large scale importations of pseudoephedrine and ephedrine for methamphetamine manufacture have also occurred recently.

Criminal groups involved in the market

The following types of criminal networks are reported to be involved with the supply of methamphetamine in Sydney:

- criminals affiliated with Outlaw Motor Cycle Gangs are notoriously involved in the production and distribution of methamphetamine
- criminal networks involved with heroin importation from Southeast and East Asia play a major role in the importation of crystalline methamphetamine
- ethnically based criminal networks in Southwest Sydney are thought to play a role in the high level distribution of crystalline methamphetamine, along with ecstasy and other drugs, particularly to nightclubs and entertainment venues
- a range of other established and emerging criminal groups, including interstate criminal networks, are also cited as being involved in Sydney's drug supply more generally

The retail market for methamphetamine

Methamphetamine distribution mainly occurs through social networks of drug users and word-of-mouth (like a pyramid or multi-level marketing scheme).

Almost all methamphetamine users report that their main dealer is a close friend or acquaintance. The majority of methamphetamine users have more than one dealer.

Methamphetamine is most often bought from the dealer's home. It is also common for transactions to take place at a pre-arranged location or for the drug to be delivered to the customer's home.

Methamphetamine is typically purchased with cash. Receiving methamphetamine on credit or in exchange for goods is rare at a retail level.

Methamphetamine users can get a variety of drugs from their dealer. Many methamphetamine dealers also sell cannabis and ecstasy, and to a lesser extent, cocaine and heroin.

Dealing methamphetamine

Most retail level dealers purchase only small quantities of methamphetamine for dealing, for example, grams or eight-balls (i.e., one-eighth of an ounce or 3.5 g), and less commonly ounces or kilograms.

Retail methamphetamine dealers make around \$400 a week from dealing, but profits can vary markedly from a few dollars if the person is 'scoring' for their friends, to thousands of dollars a week if they are selling large quantities of drugs and are selling a range of drugs.

Retail methamphetamine dealers usually start out by selling cannabis and/or methamphetamine to their friends to make a bit of extra money, and then progress to selling a broader range of drugs as they become networked with higher level drug suppliers. By selling a broad range of drugs they are able to make more money.

Information based on the findings from: **McKetin, R., McLaren, J., and Kelly, E.** (2005). *The Sydney methamphetamine market: Patterns of supply, use, personal harms and social consequences*. National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund Monograph Series No. 13. Australasian Centre for Policing Research, Adelaide.

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