

Methamphetamine Use Down Among Ontario Students, 1999-2005

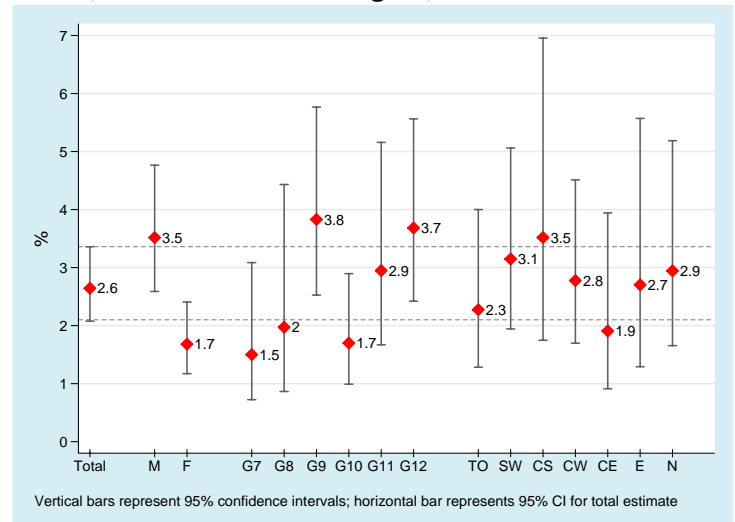
Methamphetamine belongs to a family of drugs called amphetamines – powerful stimulants that speed up the body’s central nervous system. Methamphetamine is illegal in Canada, and is produced for recreational use in clandestine labs with fairly inexpensive, and often toxic or flammable, ingredients. The drug (also called “speed”) comes in pill or powder form. Crystal methamphetamine (called “ice” or “crystal”) is a more potent form of the drug that comes in clear, chunky crystals, which are smoked in a pipe. A few recent police and drug treatment reports suggest that methamphetamine use, especially crystal methamphetamine, is becoming epidemic in Western Canada.

This *eBulletin* presents the past year prevalence of any methamphetamine use (crystallized or not) among Ontario students in grades 7 to 12 in 2005, and changes since 1999 (see Adlaf & Paglia-Boak (2005) for separate drug use estimates). Data are from the *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)*, an Ontario-wide, anonymous school survey of elementary and high school students (grades 7 to 12). The *OSDUS*, conducted every two years, monitors substance use and other health risk behaviours among youth.

Any Methamphetamine Use in 2005

In 2005, 2.6% (95% CI: 2.1%-3.4%) of students report using any form of methamphetamine at least once during the 12 months before the survey. This percentage represents about 24,200 Ontario students in grades 7 to 12. Figure 1 presents the breakdown by sex, grade, and public health planning region. Males (3.5%) are more likely than females (1.7%) to report methamphetamine use. There are no significant differences among the grades, or among the regions.

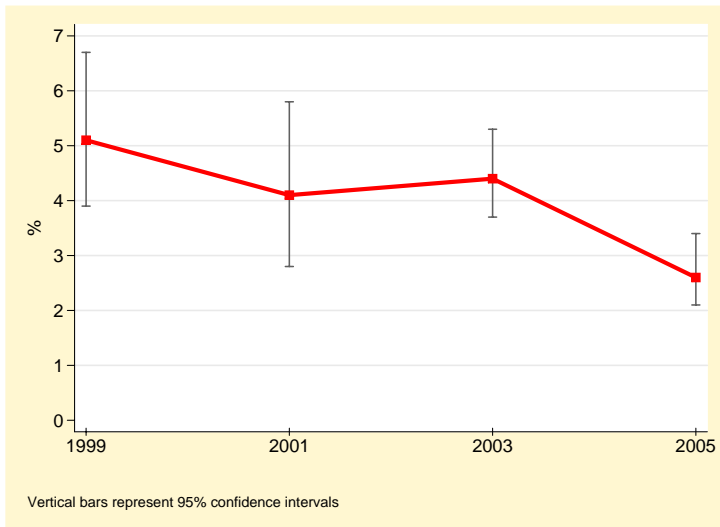
Figure 1. Percentage of Ontario Students Reporting Any Methamphetamine Use in the Past Year, by Sex, Grade, and Public Health Region, OSDUS 2005



Trends in Any Methamphetamine Use, 1999-2005

Figure 2 presents the trends in past year methamphetamine use among students surveyed between 1999 and 2005. The 2005 estimate (2.6%) is significantly lower than that found in 1999 (5.1%), and in 2003 (4.4%). Thus, there is no evidence that methamphetamine use is on the rise among the general adolescent population in Ontario. Moreover, this drop in methamphetamine use is consistent with other drug use declines found in the 2005 *OSDUS* – for example, the use of cigarettes, alcohol, inhalants, and hallucinogens.

Figure 2. Percentage of Ontario Students in Grades 7 to 12 Reporting Any Methamphetamine Use in the Past Year, OSDUS 1999-2005



It is important to note that although methamphetamine use may be increasing among some groups, at the moment there is no evidence to show that use is spreading to the mainstream adolescent population in Ontario. Indeed, not all drug epidemics diffuse into the general population. For instance, although crack-cocaine became a prominent drug in the urban street scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Ontario, it did not diffuse into the general adolescent population. In any case, the *OSDUS* will continue to monitor methamphetamine use to determine whether or not this diffusion occurs.

Methods:

The *Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS)* is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary (grades 7 and 8) and secondary (grades 9-12) school students conducted every two years since 1977. The 2005 survey, which used a stratified (region) two-stage cluster design (school, class) included 7,726 students in grades 7 to 12 from 42 school boards, 137 schools, and 445 classes. Self-administered questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University on a classroom basis between January and June 2005. The student participation rate was 72%. The 2005 full sample size of 7,726 students represents about 975,200 students in grades 7 to 12 in public and Catholic schools across the province. The results presented here are based on a random half sample in 2005 (N=3,648), 2003 (N=3,152), 2001 (N=2,061), and in 1999 (N=2,299).

All survey estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design.

Terminology:

- **Any Methamphetamine Use in the Past Year** is defined as the use of either methamphetamine (“Speed”) or crystallized methamphetamine (“Ice”) at least once during the 12 months before the survey. Specifically, the 2 drug use questions were: (1) “In the last 12 months, how often did you use methamphetamine or ‘speed’?”; and (2) “In the last 12 months, how often did you use methamphetamine in the form of ‘Ice’?”
- **Public Health Region:** Ontario has 7 public health planning regions: Toronto, South-West, Central-South, Central-West, Central-East, East, and North.
- **95% Confidence Interval (CI)** can be crudely interpreted as being 95% likely to include the “true” percentage value if every student in grades 7 to 12 in Ontario was surveyed.
- **Significant Difference** refers to a difference between two percentages that is not likely due to chance. For example, a difference found at the $p < .05$ level of statistical significance is one that is less than 5% likely to occur by chance alone.

Source:

For more detailed drug use results from the 2005 *OSDUS*, please see:

Adlaf, E.M., & Paglia-Boak, A. (2005). *Drug Use Among Ontario Students, 1977-2005: Detailed OSDUS Findings*. CAMH Research Document Series, No. 16. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (The report is available in PDF format at <http://www.camh.net/research/osdus.html>.)

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