

Crystal meth 'a new challenge'

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Methamphetamine ('crystal') is emerging as a new and serious challenge to HIV prevention and treatment in the United States, according to an article in the March 15 edition of [Clinical](#) [1]Pertaining to or founded on observation and treatment of participants, as distinguished from theoretical or basic science. Infectious Diseases .

The article, by doctors working in two HIV clinics in New York City, examines the patterns of methamphetamine use among gay men with HIV, and its potential negative effects on HIV treatment.

Methamphetamine is reported to be widely used by gay men in New York, and has recently become the subject of intense media interest.

Several US studies have shown strong linkages between methamphetamine use, HIV infection, unprotected sex and other sexually transmitted infections ([STIs](#) [2][Sexually Transmissible (or Transmitted) Infection] Infections spread by the transfer of organisms from person to person during sexual contact. Also called venereal disease (VD) (an older public health term) or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).).

In one study, 61 percent of gay men seeking treatment for methamphetamine dependence were HIV-positive.

Methamphetamine is known to suppress the immune system, by impairing CD8 cell response, a critical aspect of the body's infection-fighting arsenal. It has been suggested that the drug can increase the risk of developing, and the severity of, HIV dementia, and in studies using FIV, an HIV-like [virus](#) [3]A small infective organism which is incapable of reproducing outside a host cell. which infects cats, methamphetamine was shown to increase the ability of FIV to replicate by a factor of 15.

In a separate study published in the December 15, 2003, edition of the Journal of Infectious Diseases , investigators found that HIV-positive methamphetamine users had significantly higher viral loads than those who did not use the drug. While the conclusion of this study was that the difference was due to poorer adherence among meth users, they did not discount the possibility that meth directly influenced viral load levels.

The investigators conclude that the rising rate of methamphetamine use "poses a serious health risk by predisposing a young section of [gay men] to high-risk sexual behaviour" and that use of the drug has potentially serious medical, neurological and psychiatric implications.

— AIDSmap

- [recreational drugs](#)
- [sexually-transmissible infections](#)

Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/475>

[2] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/188>

[3] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/125>