Drug Identification and Awareness

Recognizing and understanding the signs and appearance of some common drugs within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania State Police
Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a critical role in preventing substance use and misuse. The Drug Identification and Awareness brochure is designed to be a reliable resource on the most abused and misused drugs in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This comprehensive guide provides essential information about the harms and consequences of drug use by describing a drug's effects on the body and mind, overdose potential, and other key facts.

STIMULANTS

Stimulants are called "uppers" and increase an individual's alertness and energy level. When used, stimulants produce a sense of exhilaration, enhance self-esteem, increase activity, reduce appetite, and extend wakefulness for prolonged periods. Stimulants can be pills or capsules that are swallowed, but they can also be smoked, snorted, and injected. The main stimulants are amphetamines, cocaine, and methamphetamine.

Amphetamines

Amphetamines are commonly found in pill form but may also be found in powder form. They are commonly known as the prescription drugs Adderall and Dexedrine. These drugs are prescribed for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD).

Most amphetamines have a similar effect to cocaine but a slower onset and longer duration. Chronic use of the drug may cause psychosis that resembles schizophrenia, agitation, convulsions, hallucinations, an increase in internal body temperature, and even death. It should be noted other prescription drugs are prescribed with the same prescribed usage, the same potential for abuse, and the same effects on the mind and body. These include methylphenidates, like Concerta and Ritalin, and diet aids, such as Adipex P, Bontril, Didrex, Fastin, Ionomi, and Preludin.

Short term effects include increased heart rate and blood pressure, high body temperature, muscle spasms, sleep deprivation, low appetite, and depression when not on the drug.

Long term effects include high blood pressure leading to damage of the blood vessels and heart, and unhealthy eating leading to malnutrition.

Cocaine

Cocaine is derived from the leaves of the coca plant. It is a fine, white powder typically snorted, rubbed onto the gums, or injected. Crack is an inhalable "freebase" form of cocaine which is a rock crystal. Users experience mental alertness; hypersensitivity to sound; sight; and touch; happiness; irritability; and extreme paranoia. Additional effects consist of increased agitation, body temperature, convulsions, hallucinations, and even death. Cocaine may also be used in conjunction with heroin which is called "speed balling." This method of use provides the high of cocaine without the anxiety and paranoia due to the heroin depressing the user's system.

Short term effects include feelings of euphoria, increased energy, anxiety, and increased body temperature and heart rate.

Long term effects include depression, inability to feel pleasure, paranoia, fatigue, inability to sleep, and strong cravings leading to increased risks of relapse.

Cocaine slang: Blow, Bump, C, Coke, Crack, Dust, Flake, Line, Nose Candy, Pearl, Rail, Sneeze, Sniff, Speedball, Snow, Toot, White Rock.

Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine is a highly addictive amphetamine affecting the central nervous system. This drug can be smoked, snorted, injected, or taken orally. Methamphetamine, also known as "Ice," is crystalized methamphetamine hydrochloride that is typically smoked. When smoked or injected, it provides a brief, intense sensation or rush. When orally ingested or snorted, it produces a long-lasting high instead of a rush, which reportedly can continue for as long as half a day. Both reactions result from the release of high dopamine levels into the brain. A once common method of production of methamphetamine in the Commonwealth was in one-pot laboratories. These are typically plastic bottles but can sometimes be glass that contains a mixture of organic solvents and other chemicals resulting in methamphetamine. This method of production has steadily declined in the Commonwealth.

Short term effects include rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, tremors, jaw clenching, dilated pupils, seizures, and insomnia.

Long term effects include psychotic symptoms that persist for months or years after an individual has stopped using the drug, delirium, and paranoia.

DEPRESSANTS

Depressants lessen excitement and arousal. They slow down the signals traveling from the brain to the body by affecting the central nervous system. Depressants impair coordination and focus as well as reduce a person's capacity to react quickly to unforeseen circumstances. They can make someone feel less restrained and more at ease when taken in small amounts. People misuse depressants to feel happy. Moreover, depressants are combined with other medication to increase their high or mitigate their adverse effects. They are usually found in tablet, capsule, or liquid form and are ingested orally, snorted, or injected.

Barbiturates

Barbiturates are a class of sedative medications used to treat anxiety, sleeplessness, and seizures. They are also used to induce comas. Barbiturates cause drowsiness by slowing down the central nervous system. When abused, they can lead to euphoria, abandonment of self-control, anxiety relief, loss of coordination, memory loss, and impaired judgment. Abuse of barbiturates typically involves injecting a liquid form or taking a tablet. Barbiturates are taken to relieve the side effects of illicit narcotics, lower inhibitions, and lessen anxiety.

Barbiturates have the potential to be deadly as overdoses can happen quickly and result in death. Common types of barbiturates consist of Amytal, Numbutal, and Seconal, and most are used as sedatives and sleeping pills.

Short term effects include feelings of euphoria, relaxation, sedation, unconsciousness, and decreased anxiety.

Long term effects include slowed reflexes, short-term memory loss, cardiac issues, a shortened attention span, loss of control over bodily movements, and twitching.

Methamphetamine is being mixed with fentanyl and other drugs and distributed in bags.

Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines and barbiturates have many similar traits regarding intended use and the consequences of abuse. This drug emerged as a safer prescribed drug for anxiety, sleeplessness, and seizures when compared to barbiturates. It should be noted that benzodiazepines have a high rate of dependency and abuse. Benzodiazepines are usually ground into a powder and snorted or taken in their pill or capsule form. Types of benzodiazepines consist of Xanax, Klonopin, Halcion, and Librium.

Short term effects include dilated pupils, weak pulse, erratic behavior, and clammy skin.

Long term effects include cognitive decline, slurred speech, and muscle weakness.

Fentanyl

A synthetic opioid, fentanyl, and additional fentanyl analogs have been distributed on the streets to opioid users as heroin. These analogs range from being 10 times to 1,000's of times more potent than heroin. It is easily mixed with heroin as it is most commonly a white or tan powdered substance. Fentanyl and the analogs may also be distributed in liquid form. This is one of the most lethal synthetics. These synthetic opioids are easily purchased online from Chinese vendors and sent through the mail. Fentanyl has been attributed to numerous overdoses and fatal overdoses throughout the United States. Fentanyl has also been mixed with cocaine. Due to its powdered composition, it may be easily added to any illegal substance to make it more potent. Common fentanyl analogs consist of: acetyl fentanyl, 3-methylfentanyl, furanyl-fentanyl, carfentanil, butyryl

Fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin. Carfentanil is 100 times stronger than fentanyl and 10,000 times stronger than morphine.

Heroin

Heroin is the most abused, non-pharmaceutical depressant. Heroin is an opioid synthesized from morphine; a natural substance extracted from the opium poppy plant. It is the most rapidly acting of opioids, leading to it being highly addictive both physically and psychologically. Heroin is a brown or white powder commonly packaged in glassine bags known as stamp bags. Users swallow, snort, inhale, or inject the drug. Paraphernalia items may consist of a burnt/bent spoon, anything that may be used as a tourniquet, syringes, glass pipes, small plastic baggies, tin foil lighters, razor blades, wax paper, and powdery residue on surfaces.

Short term effects include heavy pain in the arms/legs, dry mouth, severe itching, and alternation of consciousness

Long term effects include constipation, sexual dysfunction, and risk of developing mental disorders.

Opioids

Opioids are drugs used to treat pain by binding to the opioid receptors throughout the central nervous system. Opioids must be prescribed and consist of pharmaceuticals such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, methadone, buprenorphine, morphine, and fentanyl. Users may complain of constipation, nausea, vomiting, morning sickness, mood changes, changes in sleep patterns, neglectful grooming, not eating, scratching, slurred speech, and wearing long sleeves to cover up track marks from injecting the drug.

Short term effects include memory problems, sedation, and dulled senses.

Long term effects include stroke, heart attack, kidney damage, and heart infection.

HALLUCINOGENS

The earliest class of medications known to man, hallucinogens, are created synthetically or found in plants and fungi. They are used to change mood and perception in humans. One of the sensory effects is perceptual distortions which can alter the environment and mood, cause distortions related to space and time, change colors, and shift shapes.

Ketamine

Ketamine is an anesthetic used by doctors and veterinarians. It causes a state of sedation (feeling calm and relaxed), immobility, and relieves pain.

Ketamine can be injected, snorted as a powder, mixed into drinks, or smoked. Ketamine produces hallucinations lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. It warps the visual and auditory senses, leaving the user disoriented and powerless.

Short term effects include anxiety, melancholy, amnesia, confusion, unconsciousness, dilated pupils, salivation, involuntary rapid eye movement, muscle stiffness, difficulty in urinating, and abdominal pain.

Long term effects include kidney problems, high pain tolerance, inability to urinate, and abdominal pain.

LSD (Lysergic Acid Diethylamide)

LSD is a powerful hallucinogen with a significant potential for abuse that is not currently approved for use in medicine in the United States. LSD is available in liquid form, saturated sugar cubes, tablets, and most commonly in saturated absorbent paper cut into small squares with a design. LSD causes dilated pupils, higher body temperature, increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, dry mouth, and tremors.

Short term effects include hallucinations, impulsive behavior, quickly shifting emotions, and the sensations of the mind leaving the body.

Long term effects include Hallucinogen-Persisting Perception Disorder (HPPD), panic attacks, suicidal thoughts, violent behavior, paranoia, and severe anxiety.

MDMA (Methylenedioxymethamphetamine)

MDMA is a synthetic drug commonly known as "Ecstasy" or "Molly." Chemically, it is similar to hallucinogens and stimulants. It produces increased energy, a distorted perception for the user, sensory loss, pleasure, and increased body temperature. MDMA is typically ingested via capsule or tablet but may also be snorted or swallowed in liquid form. MDMA is alleged to be the purest when found in crystalline powder. This form usually contains synthetic cathinone ("Bath Salts") instead of MDMA. MDMA effects may last approximately three to six hours. Ecstasy and Molly may also contain other additives such as ketamine, cocaine, methamphetamine, and cough medicine.

Short term effects include distortions of time, an elevated sense of empathy, sweating, nausea, chills, and tremors.

Long term effects include depression, sleep issues, impulsiveness, anxiety, and depression.

Psilocybin (Mushrooms/Shrooms)

Psilocybin naturally occurs in certain types of mushrooms. When ingested, psilocybin causes hallucinations along with difficulty separating reality from fantasy. In addition, panic attacks and psychotic-like episodes could happen, especially if a person takes a large dose. Incorrect identification of psilocybin mushrooms can lead to poisoning and possible death if consumed.

Short term effects include dilated pupils, excessive sweating, coordination problems, hallucinations, and emotionally disturbing experiences.

Long term effects include drug-induced psychosis and HPPD or flashbacks of the impact when the user last took the drug.

CANNABIS

Cannabis, also known as marijuana, is one of the most commonly abused drugs. Marijuana has the same stimulant and depressive properties as alcohol, but remains in the user's system longer. The substance has also triggered psychotic episodes among some users.

Marijuana may be ingested by smoking, vaping, or eating. Marijuana is part of the hemp plant, which contains tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) that causes the "high." It is a leafy substance that may be green, brown, or gray. The mind-altering chemical can be used to infuse gummies, baked goods, candies, etc. Cannabis can be purchased legally from dispensaries with an active medical marijuana prescription from a doctor. Several cities throughout the Commonwealth have decriminalized cannabis, changing the charge for possession of cannabis from a misdemeanor charge to a summary offense. These cities include Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, State College, and York.

Short term effects include short term memory loss, anxiety, paranoia, psychosis, panic, hallucinations, slowed reaction time, increased heart rate, increased appetite, and lack of coordination.

Long term effects include a decline in brain function, long term memory loss, impaired thinking, inability to learn and perform complex tasks, and addiction.

Common Drug Paraphe

Cocaine

THC infused candy

Uninflated balloons and whip-i

Assorted Paraphernalia

Prescription Pill bottles

Cocaine

Methamphetamine

Syringe and Soda can

Glow Sticks

Glassine packet

Vape pen

Marijuana

Methamphetamine

"Trash cans" - paraphernalia

ernalia and Packaging*

it cartridges

- **Aluminum foil or aluminum gum wrappers**
- **Bottle caps**
- **Burnt and bent metal spoons or measuring spoons**
- **Candles, lighters, matches, etc.**
- **Children's vitamin containers**
- **Cotton balls, cotton pieces, or cigarette filters**
- **Glow sticks**
- **Metal dish pad**
- **Pacifiers**
- **Pill grinder**
- **Pipes and bongs**
- **Razor blades, credit cards, ID cards**
- **Rolled paper, money, cut-up straws, pen shells, etc.**
- **Shoelaces, string, rubber bands, belts, etc.**
- **Soda cans**
- **Syringes**
- **Uninflated Balloons**
- **Vaporizers**

****Drug users are very creative in their methods of ingestion, concealment, and packaging. This is not an all inclusive list as each user may have their own specific or unique techniques.***

Warning Signs of Drug Abuse

Common signs and symptoms

- Risk-taking when using such as having unprotected sex, driving recklessly, or gambling.

- Neglecting responsibilities at school, work, or home.

- Legal trouble, such as arrest for disorderly conduct or driving under the influence.

Physical warning signs

- Bloodshot eyes, pupils larger or smaller than usual.

- Changes in appetite, sleep patterns, and physical appearance.

- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing, or impaired coordination.

Behavioral signs

- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school.

- Engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors.

- Sudden change in friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies.

Psychological warning signs

- Unexplained change in personality or attitude.

- Sudden mood swings, irritability, spaced-out or angry outbursts.

- Appears fearful, anxious, or paranoid, with no reason.

RPD/OS-10/26-PSP
Version 08 2025