



Illicit drug contamination in homes, What do you need to know?

Purpose

This fact sheet provides information on potential health risks and management measures associated with illicit drug contamination of homes, in particular from methylamphetamine (meth) which is quite common and best understood.

Introduction

Illicit drug residues can occur on surfaces in residential properties as a result of manufacturing or smoking illicit drugs. These residues have the potential to pose a risk to the health of occupants. Taking illicit drugs by other means (injecting, snorting or swallowing) is far less contaminating than smoking, which in turn normally has much lower residue levels than result from manufacture. Smoking is much more common than manufacture.

Meth (crystal meth or ice) is usually the most common drug involved in either case, but other possible illicit drug residues can include cocaine, heroin and THC (from cannabis).

Without remediation a residue may remain in a property for a long time. So, its presence may be unrelated to the current occupants.

What is the risk?

Contamination is typically invisible. When a drug is present on surfaces within a property, any person living there has the potential to be exposed to those residues. Exposure can be by absorption through the skin, by eating foods in contact with the residues or by breathing them in if the material becomes airborne.

Meth and other illicit drugs have their primary effect on the central nervous system which can lead to addictive behaviour, permanent psychological problems, and other severe health impacts. While the health impacts on drug users is well known, the effects of prolonged passive exposure on other people such as those living in a drug contaminated property, are poorly understood, though more so with meth.

The level of risk largely depends on the level of contamination and the susceptibility of the people living in the house, with children (especially toddlers) and pregnant women being of most concern.

In some cases the contamination may be low-level, for instance with infrequent drug smoking. However, in other cases, contamination levels and risk can be high, such as where there has been prolonged heavy use and/or manufacture of the drug.

Signs of excessive exposure to illicit drug residues can include mental, behavioural and respiratory effects, such as migraines, disturbed sleep and asthma type symptoms, respectively. At this level of

exposure, the signs can be subtle and in fact be entirely unrelated to residue exposure. The range and severity of effects will increase with level of residue exposure.

What to do about contamination?

You may become aware or suspect your property is contaminated in several ways. Your Local Government Authority (LGA) may write or visit you with evidence of illicit drug use or past operation of a laboratory. Alternatively, you may suspect contamination due to positive results of testing you have done or commissioned, or unusual activities of occupants, such as strange visitor patterns or chemical smells. If you are concerned about activities you may wish to contact Crime Stoppers.

If you decide to test for contamination or have remediation done, the Department of Health (DOH) recommends that you use someone from their list of accredited service providers.

If smoke house contamination is present (i.e. low level) remediation will normally consist of several washes with an alkaline detergent. The DOH recommends a method for this. It would be best to document and/or obtain the cleaner's written report on the cleaning to demonstrate that it has been effective, and also for referral if necessary to the LGA.

If the contamination is associated with a clan lab it will be much greater and require more thorough and professional remediation and validation afterwards, as specified in DOH guidance. Normally you will be directed what to do by your Local Government after the detection of clan lab activities.

Cleaning up of a contaminated property **before renting out or selling** is particularly important because future occupants, including vulnerable groups, will not be aware of any contamination risks.

Summary of possible actions to take:

- For illicit drug contamination information and decontamination method go to DOH website: healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Illicit-drug-activities-and-residues-in-homes
- For specific advice contact DOH on 08 9388 4999 or GVH.Reception@health.wa.gov.au
- To report a suspect illicit activity contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or [Crime Stoppers \(external site\)](#)
- To undertake surface testing or remediation use accredited DOH service providers: ww2.health.wa.gov.au/~media/Files/Corporate/general%20documents/Clandestine%20drug%20labs/PDF/companies-qualified-for-testing-and-remediating-chemical-residues.pdf
- For remediation of a smoke house using the DOH recommended method: [https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/~media/Files/Corporate/general documents/Clandestine drug labs/PDF/Interim-Guide-for-Remediation-of-Low-Level-Illicit-Drug-Contamination.pdf](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/~media/Files/Corporate/general%20documents/Clandestine%20drug%20labs/PDF/Interim-Guide-for-Remediation-of-Low-Level-Illicit-Drug-Contamination.pdf). This method was cited in the body of the Factsheet
- If contacted by a LGA comply with its advice or directions.
- For a suspected or known clan lab comply with the DOH Guidelines: ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Clandestine-drug-labs

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