

Risks of Meth Exposure to Children

Exposure during pregnancy

- Meth use is associated with poor prenatal care, poor maternal nutrition, and use of alcohol and other damaging substances
- Increased risk of birth defects
- Increased risk of developing attentional difficulties, behavioral difficulties, and learning disabilities, especially in the area of language
- Increased risk of prematurity or low birth weight babies who may show:
 - Difficulty sucking and/or swallowing
 - Hypersensitivity to touch and light and therefore be difficult to soothe
 - Extreme irritability
 - Tremors and coordination problems

Risks of exposure to meth lab environment

- Children are at higher risk than adults to toxic effects of chemicals due to their developing brains, higher metabolic and absorption rates, and young children's hand-to-mouth and crawling behaviors.
- Poisoning and toxic exposures resulting in skin and eye irritations, respiratory problems; internal organ damage; neurological damage; speech/language delay
- Lab environments are at high risk for fire, explosions, weapons and accidents
- Because of dangers of contamination, children removed from meth labs cannot take any possessions, clothes, or familiar comfort objects which adds to the trauma of out-of-home placement.

Risks of living with meth-addicted adults

- Meth use affects the user's ability to care for children as the characteristics of meth using adults can range from mood swings, irritability, increased physical and sexual activity, and prolonged sleeping to volatile, violent and/or psychotic behavior.
- Children therefore are frequently neglected, certainly emotionally, and often physically (e.g. malnourishment, poor supervision).
- Children are at significantly increased risk for physical and sexual abuse from adults in the environment and/or exposure to inappropriate sexuality and violence
- Exposure to chaotic life style contributes to poor self-regulation and socialization in children, often resulting difficulties in school
- Children experience significant trauma by removal from primary caregivers which may be necessary to ensure safety
- Children living with meth-addicted adults are at increased risk for attachment difficulties, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health disorders.

This information is taken from articles available on the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/meth

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