

Understanding and managing methamphetamine toxicity in the ER: A quick guide for emergency room professionals

This guide is designed to support ER providers in delivering compassionate, effective care to patients experiencing methamphetamine-related toxicity.

Recognizing Methamphetamine Toxicity Symptoms

Methamphetamine toxicity, often called “overamping,” can present with a combination of physical and psychological symptoms. Quick identification and response can save lives.

Physical Symptoms:



Rapid heart rate (tachycardia) and high blood pressure (hypertension)



Uncontrollable tremors or “flailing” movements



Overheating (hyperthermia) or profuse sweating



Severe dehydration

Psychological Symptoms:



Paranoia, hallucinations, or delusions



Severe anxiety, panic attacks, or psychosis



Intense restlessness or agitation



Blackouts or memory loss

Recommended Responses in the ER

Healthcare professionals can play a critical role in stabilizing patients experiencing methamphetamine toxicity.



1. Calming Techniques

Reduce stimuli: Create a quiet, calm environment by dimming lights, reducing noise, and keeping treatment areas free of distractions.

Establish trust: Use a calm, steady voice and avoid sudden movements.



2. Managing Overamping

Cool down overheated patients: Use cooling blankets, fans, or cold compresses.

Rehydrate: Administer IV fluids to address dehydration.

Address psychiatric symptoms: Consider short-term use of benzodiazepines or antipsychotics for severe agitation, psychosis, or anxiety (per hospital protocols).



3. Escalating Care

Recognize critical symptoms: Look for stroke, heart attack, or seizures. Symptoms may include chest pain, difficulty speaking, or loss of consciousness.

Respond quickly: Call for immediate interventions when severe complications arise.

Reducing Stigma and Building Trust

Building trust with patients reduces the likelihood of delayed care and improves outcomes.

Use Non-Judgmental Language:



Avoid stigmatizing terms: Replace “addict” or “junkie” with “person who uses methamphetamine.”



Be empathetic: Recognize that fear and shame may prevent patients from seeking help earlier.

Communicate Supportively:



Acknowledge fears: Reassure patients they are in a safe place and that the focus is on their well-being.



Explain your actions: Walk them through each step of their care to reduce anxiety and paranoia.

Coordinating with Harm Reduction Services

Methamphetamine toxicity often requires follow-up care and harm reduction strategies. Provide patients with connections to supportive resources.

Offer Harm Reduction Tools

Fentanyl test strips: Fentanyl can be intentionally or unintentionally combined with methamphetamine. Provide these to identify the presence of fentanyl, so people can take steps to reduce their risk of overdose.

Xylazine test strips: Xylazine can cause extreme sedation, increase risk for overdose, and cause severe skin wounds. Provide xylazine test strips to identify the presence of xylazine in street drugs.

Naloxone (Narcan): Many people are polysubstance users. Ensure naloxone is readily available to reverse opioid overdose, alone or in combination with other drugs. Educate patients and their friends and family on how to use it. Scan the QR below or visit www.nvopioidresponse.org to locate overdose reversal medication in NV or to learn how to become a distribution site.

Connect to Community Resources

Follow-up care: Encourage patients to contact treatment centers for ongoing counseling and support. FindTreatment.gov is a confidential and anonymous resource for persons seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders.

Harm reduction programs: Share contact information for local services, such as needle exchange programs or behavioral health centers.

Peer support: Connecting patients with a peer support specialist can improve outcomes and provide continued support after discharge. Nevada now offers a 24/7 peer warm line that hospitals can use to initiate these services.

The Nevada Warmline

A stigma-free, non-crisis peer support phone service.

Call 775-241-4212
8:00 AM – 10:00 PM
7 days a week
365 days per year

Speak one-on-one with a Peer Wellness Operator. The Warmline is confidential and staffed by trained peers in recovery who provide support to individuals impacted by mental illness or life stressors.

Change Point Harm Reduction Services

Reno, NV

Syringe exchange and mobile services available on-site at Northern Nevada HOPEs.

(775) 786-4673
ext. 1129

nvhra.org

Las Vegas Harm Reduction Center at Trac-B Exchange

Las Vegas
Nevada

(702) 840-6693

harmreductioncenterlv.com



Resources

For more tools and information on harm reduction strategies, visit nvopioidcoe.org/resources/topic/stud or scan the QR code.

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