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Rise in awareness

Wyoming Meth Project counters study on related effort, says campaign is working

By JACKIE BORCHARDT - Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Saturday, September 25, 2010 1:45 am

Teenagers in Wyoming are more aware of dangers associated with using methamphetamine than they were two years ago, according to survey results released by [the Wyoming Meth Project](#) on Friday.

The group released its findings days after [a study from the University of Washington suggested a similar program in Montana was not responsible for a decline in meth use in that state](#). Local officials also discredited the Washington study.

The Wyoming Meth Use and Attitudes Survey asked 2,652 students aged 12-17 in 22 randomly selected schools about how they perceive and use methamphetamine.

Nearly two-thirds of teenagers surveyed said there is "great risk" in trying meth once or twice -- up 11 points from the first survey given in 2008 but only 2 points since 2009 -- and 80 percent said there is "great risk" in taking meth regularly. Fewer teens also said there were benefits to taking meth, such as increasing energy, curing boredom and aiding in weight loss.

More teens -- 71 percent -- reported seeing anti-meth advertising at least once a month than in 2008, when the project launched a major advertising campaign. [The campaign's billboards and TV commercials](#) feature graphic and disturbing images with the message, "Meth: Not even once."

The Meth Project began in Montana in 2005, when the state ranked fifth in the nation for meth abuse. Meth use dropped 63 percent between 2005 and 2009 there, a figure attributed to a smaller number of youths taking the drug in the Washington study. The study did not find a link between the decline and the \$13 million campaign.

The researchers did not give credit to the Montana Meth Project for encouraging a decline, said Rodger McDaniel, deputy director of the Wyoming Department of Health and director of the mental health and substance abuse division.

"They really don't understand the importance of what we're doing, nor do they understand the ways these types of challenges are being met," McDaniel said.

The campaign's strategy is to educate people about the risks of using meth and relies on support from the community -- treatment programs, schools, drug court. The No. 1 predictor for drug use is perception of risk, McDaniel said. He expects effects from the awareness campaign to reach far into the future.

"Kids try drugs because they are inadequately informed about the risk," McDaniel said. "The meth project has a place in the toolbox, but not alone."

Wyoming was the fifth state to implement the project. Wyoming ranked first in the country for meth use among adults age 18-25 and second for meth use by teens 12-17 in 2008.

About \$1.2 million has been spent on the campaign since 2008, said Jean Davies, executive director of the Wyoming Meth Project. The ads will change and "get more graphic" next year to keep the message new, Davies said.

She's only received two phone calls complaining about the ads' intensity in two years. She said the images match true situations that have happened to real people.

"The biggest thing I've heard is that it's helped families talking about this," Davies said.

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