



California Dental Hygienists' Association
The Voice of Dental Hygiene

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA DENTAL HYGIENISTS ON FRONT LINES IN IDENTIFYING METHAMPHETAMINE USE IN PATIENTS

Statewide Organization Urges Greater Awareness of “Meth Mouth” as an Early Indicator of Abuse

GLENDALE, Calif. (Nov. 18, 2008) – With methamphetamine addiction continuing to skyrocket, the [California Dental Hygienists' Association](#) (CDHA) today called on the public to understand that decaying teeth can be one of the first warning signs that a family member or loved one is abusing the drug.

“The role of the dental professional is vital in early intervention because one of the first signs of meth use appears in the mouth,” said Noel Kelsch, CDHA president and a registered dental hygienist in alternative practice (RDHAP) who is an expert in the impact of methamphetamines and oral health. “This is an evil drug that is enormously addictive and eventually rots the teeth down to the gum line.”

CDHA is using November – which is National Methamphetamine Awareness Month – to help educate the public about the link between oral health and identifying methamphetamine abuse. The crisis impacts all age and economic levels of our society, including adult professionals, teenagers and children.

“As the drug becomes more pervasive throughout our society, we feel it is important to offer a number of tips for parents, family members and friends so they can be alert for possible warning signs in loved ones,” she said.

CDHA estimates 12 million Americans are hooked on meth and is offering the following tips to help the public identify early warning signs and symptoms exhibited by people using meth:

- Obvious deterioration of teeth
- Malnourished and disheveled appearance

- Abnormal vital signs
- Grinding of teeth
- Pale complexion and red eyes
- Aging in appearance
- Irritability or euphoria
- Nervousness; sweaty and clammy skin

“Hygienists are educated and trained to identify the signs and symptoms of use,” said Kelsch. “We play a role in early intervention by connecting patients to the resources they need for drug rehabilitation, treatment and recovery.”

Kelsch says that one of the biggest challenges in fighting meth abuse is that most people don’t believe someone they know could be using it.

“Most people don’t realize that this drug is available and abused by people at all levels of our society regardless of income or ethnic background,” she said. “One of the biggest mistakes that medical professionals, teachers, employers and parents make is to not be educated in this area because they think this will not occur in the population they are seeing, working with or living with.”

With greater awareness, the odds for early intervention and positive outcomes increase.

“I know in my own practice, I have had the opportunity to provide information to meth users,” said Kelsch. “In one case, the patient came back to tell me I had saved his life. Not only is this extremely gratifying, but it serves as good example of how dental hygienists are playing a critical role in helping address this public health epidemic.”

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The [California Dental Hygienists' Association \(CDHA\)](#) is the authoritative voice of the state's dental hygiene profession. The organization was established 20 years ago when two regional associations merged to form a unified professional group. CDHA represents thousands of dental hygienists throughout the state and is dedicated to expanding opportunities for the profession and access to care for all Californians.