

# Amphetamine Use 2013/14: New Zealand Health Survey

December 2014

This report presents findings from the New Zealand Health Survey (NZHS) about reported amphetamine use in the last 12 months (past year) in adults aged 16–64 years.

The NZHS data was collected from July 2013 to June 2014 in face-to-face interviews conducted in people's homes. The adult survey response rate was 80%.

Amphetamines are a group of synthetic stimulant drugs. In New Zealand one of the most commonly used types is methamphetamine, which is also known as 'P', 'meth', 'ice' or 'crystal meth'.

## What was the survey question?

The NZHS asks adults the following question about amphetamine use:

'In the last 12 months, have you used any of the following drugs for recreational or non-medical purposes, or to get high? Please just read out the number next to the words.'

Participants who selected '3', the category '**Amphetamines, for example, 'P' ('pure' methamphetamine), ice (crystal methamphetamine), speed**', were counted as people who used amphetamines in the past year.

## Results

### One percent of adults used amphetamines in the past year

In 2013/14 amphetamines were used in the past year by 1.1 % of the New Zealand population aged 16–64 years. This equates to about 30,600 New Zealanders.

### Females were less likely to have used amphetamines

Past-year amphetamine use was significantly higher ( $p < 0.05$ ) among males (1.5%; 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.1–2.1) than among females (0.7%; 0.5–0.9).

### Younger adults were more likely to use amphetamines

Amphetamine use in the past year was less likely among older age groups. Respondents aged 25–34 years reported the highest prevalence of amphetamine use in the last 12 months (2.1%; 1.4–3.1), followed by 16–24-year-olds (1.8%; 1.1–2.9). Much lower levels of past-year use were reported for 35–44-year-olds (0.7%; 0.5–1.2), 45–54-year-olds (0.5 %; 0.3–1.0) and 55–64-year-olds (0.2%; 0.1–0.4).

After adjustment for population age and sex differences, Māori were three times more likely (adjusted rate ratio (ARR) 3.0; 1.8–5.2) to have used amphetamines in the past year than non-Māori. Asians were less likely (ARR 0.0; 0.0–0.2) to have used amphetamines in the past year than non-Asians. Pacific peoples’ past-year use after adjustment was similar to that of non-Pacific peoples.

## The average age of past-year amphetamine users was 30 years

The mean age of past-year amphetamine users (aged 16–64) was 30 years (95% CI: 28–33 years).

## Past-year amphetamine use – time trends

### No change in past-year amphetamine use from 2012/13

Compared to 2012/13 (0.9%; 0.7–1.2), there was no significant difference ( $p = 0.3$ ) in 2013/14 past-year amphetamine use (1.1%; 0.8–1.4). No difference in prevalence was found between 2011/12 and 2012/13.

Amphetamine use has been measured in several national New Zealand surveys prior to the NZHS. Data from these surveys has been reanalysed to enhance comparability with the NZHS data.

The earlier national surveys used different methodologies (such as a different interview mode and different questions), which are not necessarily comparable to those used by the NZHS, so trends need to be interpreted cautiously. However, the overall indication is that the prevalence of past-year amphetamine use has declined from 2003 to 2013/14 for 16–64-year-olds (see Table 1). This decrease remained significant after adjusting for age.

**Table 1: Past-year amphetamine use in New Zealand for adults aged 16–64 years**

Year	Survey	Mode	Prevalence (%)
2003	Health Behaviours Survey – Drug Use	Telephone interview	2.7% (2.3–3.3)
2007/08	New Zealand Alcohol and Drug Use Survey	Self-completed interview	2.2 % (1.7–2.7)
2011/12	New Zealand Health Survey	Face-to-face interview	0.9% (0.7–1.1)
2012/13	New Zealand Health Survey	Face-to-face interview	0.9% (0.7–1.2)
2013/14	New Zealand Health Survey	Face-to-face interview	1.1% (0.8–1.4)

Source: Ministry of Health 2007, Ministry of Health 2009; data from NZHS 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14.

### The NZHS collected extra information on drug use in 2012/13

The NZHS consists of core questions included each year plus in-depth modules that change each year. One question about drug use in the last 12 months is asked as a core question in the NZHS survey face-to face interview.

From July 2012 to June 2013 the NZHS included a module about tobacco, alcohol and drug use. Within this module, sensitive questions, such as those about drug use, were answered by participants using self-completed computerised interviews, thereby providing a better estimate of recreational drug use than a face-to-face interview. The data collected in the 2012/13 NZHS module will be

comparable to data collected from the 2007/08 New Zealand Alcohol and Drug Use Survey, allowing drug use trends to be explored more reliably. An in-depth analysis of the 2012/13 NZHS drug module, including amphetamine use, will be produced in 2015.

## **Guide to interpreting this report: The findings presented above may be an underestimate**

In 2013/14, 123 respondents said that they had used amphetamines in the past 12 months (1.1 %; 0.8–1.4). Respondents in face-to face interviews, such as the 2013/14 NZHS, may be more likely to conceal what they perceive to be an undesirable behaviour such as drug use. Therefore these types of surveys may underestimate the prevalence of recreational drug use in the population (Rogers et al 1998).

Also, the NZHS did not include people living in prisons and the homeless. Both these populations have a higher prevalence of drug use (Al-Nasrallah et al 2005; Department of Corrections 2004; Fazel et al 2008). However, as these populations comprise a very small proportion of the total population, the impact of omitting them is likely to be minimal.

There are important differences between the surveys compared in Table 1, which should be considered when interpreting the data. These include differences in the way the surveys were administered, survey context, survey response rate and question wording. Specific details about the methodological differences are discussed in *Amphetamine Use 2012/13: Key findings of the New Zealand Health Survey*. [www.health.govt.nz/publication/amphetamine-use-2012-13-key-findings-new-zealand-health-survey](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/amphetamine-use-2012-13-key-findings-new-zealand-health-survey)

## **New Zealand Health Survey background**

The NZHS is an ongoing survey that has been in the field on a continuous basis since July 2011. More information, reports and methodological details about the NZHS can be found at [www.health.govt.nz/nz-health-statistics/national-collections-and-surveys/surveys/current-recent-surveys/new-zealand-health-survey](http://www.health.govt.nz/nz-health-statistics/national-collections-and-surveys/surveys/current-recent-surveys/new-zealand-health-survey)

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## **References**

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