

PHENCYCLIDINE (PCP)

WHAT IS PHENCYCLIDINE (PCP)?

Phencyclidine is also called PCP or "angel dust." It is a drug with both hallucinogenic and depressant effects. It was first tried as a surgical anesthetic but caused unpleasant side effects. It was soon legally restricted to veterinary use for a time, but is now illegal. PCP on the street today is illegally made.

PCP may be in pill, powder, or crystal form. It is most often swallowed or smoked. It is sometimes injected.

WHAT ARE PCP'S IMMEDIATE EFFECTS?

Effects vary according to dosage levels. Low doses may provide euphoria, mood changes, and altered perceptions. Other effects include dulled senses, reduced sensitivity to pain, loss of coordination, and speech problems.

[What Works: Workplaces, Dept. of Labor, 1991, page 61]

With larger doses the user becomes excited and confused. Muscles may become rigid, memory and mental focus may be lost, and vision may be altered. Delirium may occur. Intense mood change may include feelings of isolation, fear of death, and changes in the users' perceptions of their bodies. Behavior may become violent.

Research shows that PCP confuses the brain's stimuli, changing how users perceive and deal with people and events. Common tasks like driving or walking may become difficult.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF PCP USE?

In low or high doses, PCP can produce violent and bizarre actions even in people not prone to such behavior. These can result in injury or death for the user or others. PCP's effects also make driving a vehicle or operating machinery unsafe.

Large doses of PCP can cause convulsions, coma, heart failure, lung failure, or ruptured blood vessels in the brain. Death can result.

One of the drug's dangers is that the effects are unpredictable. They vary widely from person to person and from time to time.

WHAT ARE THE LONGER-TERM RISKS OF THE DRUG?

Some users suffer from a schizophrenic-like psychosis that can last for days or weeks. These users may sometimes be excited, incoherent, and aggressive. At other times they may be uncommunicative, depressed, and withdrawn. Paranoia, a feeling of being persecuted, often occurs.

Chronic users report memory and speech problems that may last up to a year after drug use has ended. Users may become depressed, anxious, or violent. They may have hallucinations. What Works: Workplaces, Dept. of Labor, 1991, page 61]

HOW DO USERS GET PCP?

Nearly all PCP is now made illegally. Because PCP has a bad reputation on the street, dealers often sell it as some other drug, such as mescaline or "THC". Buyers of street drugs risk using PCP without knowing it.



HOW COMMON IS PCP USE?

PCP was not popular with drug users in the 1960's and early 1970's due to its unpleasant effects. It saw more use in the late 1970's. Use has declined from 1979. Among United States high school seniors from 1980 to 2000, use in the past 30 days has varied irregularly in the range between .4% and 1.6%.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF PCP USE DURING PREGNANCY?

Any drug taken by a pregnant woman will affect her unborn child. PCP crosses the placenta to the fetus. Because PCP has many effects of a depressant, the effects may be severe,

perhaps including withdrawal, birth defects, and behavioral problems.

Studies indicate that babies born to women who used PCP during pregnancy tend to be small, irritable, and sensitive to sound. Some motor and mental problems still exist at five years.

A woman who is pregnant, considering pregnancy, or breastfeeding should not use PCP.

LEGAL INFORMATION

Phencyclidine is a Controlled Substance under Michigan and federal law. Use, possession, delivery, possession with intent to deliver, and manufacture of the drug are all illegal. Penalties include imprisonment and fines. Certain penalties are mandatory.

Penalties are increased if a person eighteen years or older distributes the drug to a person under eighteen, or distributes the drug near school property.

For details on the legal penalties, refer to the Michigan Law Fact Sheet in this series.

SOURCES

What Works: Workplaces. United States Department of Labor, 1991.

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