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Teens see more risks using meth

By Baylie Evans

bevans@wyomingnews.com

CHEYENNE -- According to a study by the Wyoming Meth Project released last week, teens are more aware of the risks of using methamphetamine now than they were in 2008.

The survey, called the Wyoming Meth Use and Attitudes Study, found that 80 percent of Wyoming teens aged 12 through 17 see risk in trying meth once or twice, and 64 percent see "great risk" in trying it. Both numbers are 11 percentage points higher than they were in 2008, when the Wyoming Meth Project began.

This year's study was completed by a survey company. Data was compiled for about six weeks during April and May, when 2,652 junior- and senior-high students from 22 randomly selected schools in Wyoming were interviewed.

Schools had to agree to participate, explained Jean Davies, the executive director of the Wyoming Meth Project. While they had trouble getting permission in previous years, she said all the schools gave them permission to survey the students this year. So this study could be more accurate than ones in previous years.

The study also found that the number of teens who said they saw "great risk" in several specific dangers of using meth, such as tooth decay and brain damage, was significantly higher as well.

Teens also see fewer benefits to using the drug. More disagree that the drug helps a person deal with boredom, helps with weight loss or makes a person feel very happy.

Davies said the survey contains some good news, and she praised several state organizations and agencies for coming together to address the issue.

However, the work isn't finished, she said. There are always new generations of potential drug-users growing up, and prevention programs can't ignore them.

So she said the Wyoming Meth Project will continue its public presence with advertisements and

education programs, which the study also found are reaching a majority of teens and teaching them about the drug's dangers.

"We want families talking, not just about meth, but about marijuana and other drugs. And we've seen that happening," Davies said. "(We will) keep talking about it and getting other people to talk about it."

Rodger McDaniel, deputy director of the Wyoming Department of Health, said the state has made some strides toward preventing and treating meth use.

The good news is that meth use has declined over the last 10 years, he said.

But he also said the work is not finished.

"This whole area of substance abuse will always be a problem," he said. "While meth use is down, prescription drug abuse is going up. Use of marijuana and alcohol continue to be a plague in the state."

Two-thirds of Wyoming residents see no risk in marijuana use or binge drinking, he said.

There is no vaccine to prevent substance abuse, and efforts to prevent and treat users should be continued.

"It's like that game at the carnival: Whack-a-mole," he said. "Every time you feel like you've made some progress, the problem pops up with a different face on it."

For more information about the Wyoming Meth Project and the survey, visit www.wyomingmethproject.org/research.