

What is ice?

Ice is a crystalline version of methamphetamine, which is a very potent type of amphetamine. Shabu, Buku, S., O.S., Oriental Snow, Hiroppon, Kaksanjae, Glass and Batu are all street names for ice.

What does it look like?

As ice is made in illicit laboratories the production methods vary, resulting in a range of different appearances. It is usually white or clear in colour, but can also be yellow or green. It comes as crystals, rocks or flakes. Some ice is water-based, some is oil-based and can appear waxy. Some ice smells of coconut, but it is generally odourless. Wraps of ice are usually packaged in plastic or foil.

What are its effects?

When inhaled, ice produces an intense rush (users say better than crack). This is followed by between two to 36 hours of stimulation, excitement, talkativeness, feelings of well-being, confidence and alertness. It also causes increased heart rate, a rise in body temperature and loss of appetite. The effects are similar to those of crack and of amphetamine sulphate but more intense and longer lasting.

What are the risks?

As with crack, the intense rush creates an immediate risk of heart attack or stroke which can be fatal. Other possible side-effects are nervousness, anxiety, depression, paranoia, psychosis, moodiness, irritability, aggression, violent behaviour, Parkinsonian-like movements, disturbed sleep or insomnia, impaired speech, numbness, loss of interest in food, sex and social activities, hallucinations, weight loss, lowered immunity, damage to kidneys, lungs, liver and possibly the brain.

What does it cost?

Ice costs around £250-£300 per gram and is generally available in £50 or £100 wraps. Users suggest that £50 worth would provide seven or eight 'hits' each for four or five people.

Where does it come from?

The drug is largely associated with Pacific Rim communities such as China, Japan Korea and the Philippines. Japan has a long history of chronic amphetamine use going back to the end of the Second World War. The drug has also appeared in Hawaii and on the US mainland west coast.

Who is using ice?

At present ice use in Britain appears to be limited to those who represent the Pacific Rim countries mentioned above. The drug has also been encountered in British-based Pakistani and Indian people who have used it during their travels in Hong Kong, Korea and Japan. There is some evidence that other groups are starting to experiment with it. Some users have taken it unknowingly as it has been sold as crack or a mixture of cocaine, amphetamine and heroin.

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