

Staying safe: Helping someone who has taken crystal methamphetamine or another illegal drug



The effects of crystal methamphetamine ('ice') can be unpredictable as there is no quality control of the illegal drug when it is manufactured. Some people may experience serious symptoms related to **panic attacks**, dehydration and seizures. Below are some tips on how to help someone experiencing these symptoms. **It is important to call for an ambulance immediately if there is any risk that someone is having an unusual reaction to ice or any other drug.**

If a person is unconscious, or non-responsive but breathing, they should be placed in the recovery position while waiting for help to arrive. If they are left lying on their back, they could suffocate on their vomit or their tongue could block their airway. Putting someone in the recovery position will help to keep the airways open.

Panic Attacks

Ice use can cause **paranoia**, **anxiety** and **hallucinations** which may lead to a **panic attack**.

Signs include:

- Shaking and sweating
- Increased heart rate
- Chest pains and difficulty breathing
- Dizziness, headaches, and light-headedness
- Fear that the panic attack may lead to death
- Non-responsiveness and appearing to be 'spaced out'

How to respond:

- Take them somewhere cool and quiet away from bright lights and crowds
- Reassure them that the feeling will pass and try to keep them calm
- Encourage them to take long, deep breaths to help them relax
- If they pass out due to over-breathing, call for help immediately and follow the [DRSABCD life support steps](#).

Overheating and Dehydration

Ice can increase body temperature especially when taken with alcohol. There is also a serious risk of overheating and dehydration when people dance for hours while using ice, particularly if they do not maintain their fluids.

Signs include:

- Feeling hot, lethargic, unwell, faint, or dizzy
- Headaches
- Vomiting
- Inability to talk properly
- Not sweating even when dancing
- Inability to urinate or urine becoming thick and dark
- Fainting, collapsing, or convulsing

How to respond:

- Take them somewhere cool and quiet
- Make sure someone stays with them
- Get the person some cold water for them to sip slowly
- Fan them to cool them down
- Give them salted foods like crisps or peanuts to replace salts lost through sweating
- If symptoms persist or get worse seek first aid immediately. Call '000' or take them to the nearest emergency department.

Feeling very drowsy

If someone becomes very drowsy as a result of using ice, they could fall asleep and lose consciousness.

How to respond:

- Call an ambulance, but make sure they are not left on their own

- Don't give them coffee or try to shock them
- Keep them awake while waiting for the ambulance - make them walk around or make them talk to you
- If they aren't responsive or lose consciousness put them in the [recovery position](#).

Fits or Seizures (Convulsions)

Someone who has used ice, particularly those who have also used alcohol, may experience convulsions otherwise known as fits or seizures.

How to respond:

- Call an ambulance
- Loosen any tight clothing
- Clear the area of any nearby harmful objects
- Do not try to restrict their movement or place anything in their mouth
- Cushion their head
- Once the fit has finished, check their breathing and put them in the [recovery position](#).

Stroke

Use of methamphetamines (such as ice) may cause a **stroke** to occur.

A stroke is always a medical emergency. The longer a stroke remains untreated, the greater the chance of stroke-related brain damage.

The [Stroke Foundation](#) recommends the F.A.S.T. test as an easy way to remember the most common signs of stroke.

Using the [F.A.S.T. test](#) involves asking these simple questions:

- Face. Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?
- Arms. Can they lift both arms?
- Speech. Is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?
- Time Is critical. If you see any of these signs call 000 straight away.

Other signs include:

- Weakness or numbness or paralysis of the face, arm or leg on either or both sides of the body
- Difficulty speaking or understanding
- Dizziness, loss of balance or an unexplained fall
- Loss of vision, sudden blurring or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Headache, usually severe and abrupt onset or unexplained change in the pattern of headaches

- Difficulty swallowing

While you are waiting for the ambulance to arrive:

- If the person is conscious, lay them down on their side with their head slightly raised and supported.
- Do not give them anything to eat or drink.
- Loosen any restrictive clothing that could cause breathing difficulties.
- If weakness is obvious in any limb, support it and avoid pulling on it when moving the person.
- If they are unconscious, check their breathing and pulse and put them on their side. If they do not have a pulse or are not breathing, start CPR straight away.

Follow this [step-by-step guide to performing CPR](#).

For more information about responding to stroke, visit the [Stroke Foundation](#) website.

A Person Collapses

If a person collapses it may be necessary to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in order to temporarily maintain circulation to the brain to keep it functioning. Follow this [step-by-step guide to performing CPR](#).

Want more information? Visit [Positive Choices](#) for evidence-based information and resources that can help you make informed choices about ice and other drugs, and prepare you to support friends you may be concerned about.



Positive Choices