

The impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on drug purchasing behaviours of people who use methamphetamine in Victoria, Melbourne.

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Introduction and Aims: Cross-sectional studies suggest COVID-19 and associated social restrictions have had a profound impact on drug markets. Our study examined whether COVID-19 impacted drug purchasing and use behaviours longitudinally in the 'VMAX' cohort of people who use methamphetamine in Victoria, Australia.

Method / Approach: Data on methamphetamine purchase price, quantity and drug use frequency were obtained from 185 VMAX participants who reported methamphetamine purchase after 16/03/2020. Impacts of different phases of restrictions on methamphetamine price (as price paid per gram), use frequency and other drug use frequency in Victoria were examined, along with the impacts of a range of covariates.

Results: Methamphetamine prices increased significantly between lockdowns 1 and 2 (158 Australian dollars, AUD), during lockdown 2 (457AUD) and after lockdown 2 (264AUD) compared to pre-COVID measures. The impact of lockdown 2 was greatest in regional Victoria.

Average days of methamphetamine use per week declined during lockdown 1 (0.54 days), during lockdown 2 (0.74 days) and after lockdown 2 (0.70 days) significantly. While there was no effect of rurality, participants who earned > 600AUD per week reported more frequent methamphetamine consumption. There were no corresponding changes in the use of other drugs, including alcohol or tobacco.

Discussions and Conclusions: We found significant longitudinal impacts of COVID-19 and associated restrictions on the methamphetamine market and drug use behaviours in the cohort. Impacts were largest during the most severe restrictions, and these were felt most acutely in regional Victoria, despite lesser restrictions than Melbourne, suggesting supply chain disruptions from metropolitan to regional Victoria drove this effect.

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