

HBO Documentary Spotlights Heartland Devastation of Meth Abuse

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Bad skin, a father and son sharing a smoke and a desperate mother who confesses to using while nine months pregnant are the images that stay with you from "Montana Meth," a documentary about the devastation in rural America caused by methamphetamine use. The film is scheduled to premiere March 18 at 11 p.m. New York time on HBO2.

Directed by Eames Yates, "Montana Meth" provides an unblinking view into the ruined lives of strung-out teens and their families. In areas like Cascade County, which includes Great Falls, Montana, police are all but overwhelmed by the spread of meth use.

"We work dope 24/7," Cascade County Deputy Sheriff John Stevens says. Ingredients are cheap and easily available, and new users are as close as the local high school. The problem is not confined to Montana. Methamphetamine use is cited by law enforcement as the No. 1 crime problem throughout America, leading to other crimes, including prostitution and robbery.

The film follows a two-year advertising campaign designed to educate teens and parents about the effects of meth, offering gruesome evidence of its impact, both mental and physical: hallucinations, paranoia, massive tooth decay and faces ruined by pock-marked skin and hollowed-out eyes.

The Montana Meth Project, which is running the educational campaign, claims that the campaign is working. Methamphetamine drug use among Montana teens is down 38 percent and a 2007 survey showed that 84 percent of teens now believe there is a risk in taking the drug just once or twice.

The project's slogan is "Meth, not even once." The filmmakers are counting on the documentary's stark images to scare teens thinking about trying meth to think again.

"Montana Meth" is part of a larger HBO series, "Addiction," that begins today. Information: <http://www.montanameth.org> or <http://www.hbo.com/addiction>.

(Catherine Smith is a writer for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are her own.)
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