

Heroin Health Hazards

Heroin abuse

is associated with serious health conditions, including fatal overdose, spontaneous abortion, collapsed veins, and, particularly in users who inject the drug, infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

The

short-term effects of heroin abuse appear soon after a single dose and disappear in a few hours. After an injection of heroin, the user reports feeling a surge of euphoria ("rush") accompanied by a warm flushing of the skin, a dry mouth, and heavy extremities. Following this initial euphoria, the user goes "on the nod," an alternately wakeful and drowsy state. Mental functioning becomes clouded due to the depression of the central nervous system. Long-term effects of heroin appear after repeated use for some period of time. Chronic users may develop collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, cellulitis, and liver disease. Pulmonary complications, including various types of pneumonia, may result from the poor health condition of the abuser, as well as from heroin's depressing effects on respiration.

Heroin abuse during pregnancy and

its many associated environmental factors (e.g., lack of prenatal care) have been associated with adverse consequences including low birth weight, an important risk factor for later developmental delay.

In addition to the effects of the drug itself, street heroin may have additives that do not readily dissolve and result in clogging the blood vessels that lead to the lungs, liver, kidneys, or brain. This can cause infection or even death of small patches of cells in vital organs.

The Drug Abuse Warning Network

lists heroin/morphine among the four most frequently mentioned drugs reported in drug-related death cases in 2002. Nationwide, heroin emergency department mentions were statistically unchanged from 2001 to 2002, but have increased 35 percent since 1995.

Help With Heroin Addiction:

Call
Toll Free: 888-9NO-DRUGS or 888-966-3784

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Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Photo 1: Jan Roger Johannesen