

Researcher studying danger of second-hand meth fumes, smoke

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 22 April 2011 13:37 -



Gothenburg is smack dab in the middle of a major methamphetamine trafficking corridor.

With federal restrictions on the purchase of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine (some of the ingredients used to make the drug) more meth is manufactured in Mexico and brought to the United States using major corridors like Interstate 80.

Dr. Sandra Wells of the public health department of University of Nebraska Medical Center told local Rotarians Monday that much of that meth—and what is still made in homemade labs—affects not only the user but those who live in the household.

And, although there are numerous reports on the overall dangers of meth use and production, she said the actual health consequences of second-hand exposure are largely unreported.

The assistant professor in the department of environmental, agricultural and occupational health sees second-hand exposure to meth as an increasing health problem in Nebraska and the nation.

“But most published work is about the health effects on users,” she said. “There is very little there about second-hand exposure.”

Wells, who joined UNMC in 2009, started researching problems from exposure to meth while at the University of Montana at Missoula with help through the National Alliance of Drug Endangered Children.

At her UNMC lab, research is done on respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic

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obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other environmental factors such as meth.

“We’re seeing kids with respiratory symptoms from homes where meth is used or manufactured,” Wells said.

Whether that is caused by the drug itself or poor household conditions is what the researcher wants to find out.

When meth is heated, Wells said the drug vaporizes and creates small particles that go deep into the lungs.

Even one-time moderate exposure to meth can cause injury to lungs, she said, which is why researchers want to know what happens over the long-term.

Wells hopes to develop a model that shows

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