



# OSAM-O-GRAM



DATE: January 2006

DATELINE: Dayton, Ohio

Wright State University & the University of Akron

## Reports of Increases in Crack-Cocaine Injection Across the State

Since the beginning of the OSAM Network in 2000, crack injection has rarely been reported throughout the state. However, in June 2005, reports about potential increases in crack injection were obtained in the Dayton, Akron, and Youngstown areas. In January 2006, other areas of the state, including Athens, Cincinnati, and Columbus, noted some increases in crack injection.

To prepare crack for injection, users typically “*break it down*” into a solution using lemon juice or vinegar. According to reports from active users in Dayton, crack injection is more common among the experienced heroin users who also smoke crack and/or are injecting “*speedball*” (a mixture of heroin and powdered cocaine). These users choose to inject crack for two distinct reasons: 1) crack may be easier to obtain than powdered cocaine; and 2) some users believe that by dissolving crack in vinegar or lemon juice, they can increase the purity of cocaine and receive a better high. According to the participants interviewed:

*Some people are greedy. They are trying to get as high as they can and somebody done told ‘em said, “Man, if you shoot some crack, you melt the crack down and shoot it, you’re gonna feel it twice as you would with regular powder cocaine.”* (55-year-old African-American man)

*I used to break it [crack] down to its original form. To me, it was more potent than smoking it, more intense. Because it [vinegar or lemon juice] breaks the other chemicals that are cut with it.... It breaks it [crack] down to its original [state].* (50-year-old African-American man)

According to active users, crack injection is associated with a number of negative side effects, including the risk of developing “*terrible abscesses*” and “*burning out their veins.*” Some users felt that due to these side effects, the practice of crack injection was self-limiting. A 55-year-old African-American man, who witnessed previous rises and declines in the popularity of crack injection, commented:

*Every time you inject this liquid crack with lemon juice, it burns the whole line [vein] out, so a lotta people eventually quit.... Pretty soon I’m not gonna even have a place to inject, and you cannot skin pop it. If you skin pop it, you goin’ straight to the hospital ‘cause you’re gonna have an abscess this big.*

In summary, the practice of crack injection reflects an increasing overlap between crack, powdered cocaine, and heroin distribution and abuse. Crack injection may be associated with serious health risks, including HIV infection and other blood-borne diseases. For more information on crack injection in Ohio, see: Carlson, RG, Falck, RS, Siegal, HA (2000) Crack-Cocaine Injection in the Heartland: An Ethnographic Perspective. *Medical Anthropology* 18:305-323.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the January 2005 OSAM Network meeting.

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