Powerful Form of Meth Floods Pennsylvania Market, DA Says

July 12, 2019

July 12, 2019 - PRESSADVANTAGE -

A powerful form of methamphetamine is flooding the Pennsylvania market, according to investigators in Chester County. District Attorney Thomas P. Hogan expects a deluge of pure crystal methamphetamine to storm back into Southeastern Pennsylvania, buoyed by savvy drug dealers looking to expand beyond opioids in the midst of the drug epidemic.

The DA said his office first noticed the trend last year, with aggressive Mexican cartels attempting to flood the market with the drug.

?They?re responding to supply and demand, like any other business. When they see opioid use going down, they?re responding with this,? Hogan said. ?Like Big Pharma, they?re getting people to use the drugs and get hooked, and then they?re taking advantage of supply lines that have already been established.?

Hogan described the situation after recently arresting a midlevel meth dealer in the county. Ruben Vargas-Santillan, a Mexican national living illegally in Reading, has been charged with multiple felony drug offenses after a months-long investigation by Hogan?s office.

Vargas-Santillan, 35, allegedly sold cocaine and then crystal meth to an informant. The informant revealed that Vargas-Santillan steadily increased the amount of meth being sold each time. Click the link to see Ithaca's top rehab placement programs.

Investigators raided his home in Berks County and found nearly a pound of crystal meth, as well as several pounds of cocaine and marijuana, according to the affidavit of probable cause for his arrest.

?This is a medium-sized case,? Hogan said. ?But it demonstrates a pattern we?re seeing in Chester County and throughout the country.?

Hogan noted that the drug?s local popularity waned after the mid-2000s. Back then, the arrests were for a less potent homemade variety called ?biker meth?. This more recent wave of sales features crystal meth that is made in labs in the Mexican desert and then smuggled over the country?s southwestern border.

Crystal meth seizures have spiked nationally in the last five years according to Laura Hendrick, field intelligence manager for the Philadelphia office of the Drug Enforcement Administration. Crystal meth seizures jumped 50 percent in Pennsylvania since 2015.

The supply is meeting demand?mostly opioid users who take the drug to help mitigate withdrawal symptoms between fixes.

?The business model for cartels is all profit driven?meth is easy to make and produce,? Hendrick said. ?If they can put a lab together, they already have markets where they push heroin and fentanyl, and they supply these new drugs on top of those as they look for users.?

Law enforcement officials in Chester County aren?t only dealing with midlevel dealers, however. In the last year, they have handled high profile cases in which meth played a role. Nicholas Spadaro, a Valley Township resident, killed another man in the middle of a meth deal in November, according to Hogan. In December, a man strangled his girlfriend while high on the drug.

There was also a case involving 42-year-old resident Brian Touchton who fled from state police who tried to pull him over while he was drunk and high on meth. This incident sparked a police-involved shooting, according to Hogan.

?We?re sounding the alarm now because law enforcement is dealing with it, and we want the public to be aware that we?re dealing with it,? Hogan said. ?Because crystal meth is back, and it?s back with a vengeance.?

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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