

"Bath Salts" Intoxication

Investigation into a cluster of cases in Michigan leads to characterization of this new recreational drug.

In early 2011, a Michigan poison control center received reports of several patients injecting, inhaling, or ingesting "bath salts" as recreational drugs. Purchased at a local store, the "bath salts," which have no legitimate use for bathing, contained the stimulant compounds 3,4-methylenedioxypropylamphetamine (MDPV) or 4-methylmethcathinone (mephedrone). Subsequent statewide investigation identified 35 patients (age range, 22–50) who presented to emergency departments with "bath salt" intoxication during 5 months.

Nearly half of patients had histories of psychiatric illness, and 69% had self-reported histories of drug abuse. Ninety-one percent presented with neurological symptoms (e.g., mydriasis, motor automatisms), 77% exhibited cardiovascular symptoms (e.g., hypertension, tachycardia), and 49% showed psychological symptoms (e.g., delusions, hallucinations, agitation, paranoia). One patient was dead on arrival, and 17 were admitted (9 to intensive care). Most patients were treated with benzodiazepines and observed; all recovered uneventfully.

Comment: The Drug Enforcement Administration has identified "bath salts" as a drug of concern. For emergency providers, the emergence of this new drug of abuse should lead to questions about use of "bath salts" when patients present with psychiatric, cardiovascular, and neurological symptoms consistent with stimulant use. Treatment is the same as for other sympathomimetics — titrated doses of benzodiazepines and general supportive measures.

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