

Tucson Citizen

Meth-use rate for kids highest in Navajo Cnty

[SONU MUNSHI](#)

Published: 09.13.2007

PHOENIX - One out of 10 eighth-, 10th- and 12th-graders in Navajo County has tried methamphetamine at least once, a figure that highlights the dangers the drug poses to rural Arizona, the first lady of the Navajo Nation said Wednesday.

"This is the highest figure among all Arizona counties. We need to do something fast," Vikki Shirley said, calling for more money to be devoted to treatment and enforcement.

Shirley, wife of Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley Jr., joined state Attorney General Terry Goddard and other leaders at a ceremony honoring youths who have pledged not to try meth. Shirley is co-chair of the Arizona Meth Project, an advertising and anti-meth education program.

Shirley said the Navajo Nation's size makes it difficult to combat meth abuse through education and law enforcement. Another challenge is that meth is relatively inexpensive.

"Adults can't deal with the poverty and lack of jobs in our area, and this is an easy way out for them," she said.

Char James, program project specialist with the Navajo Nation's Department of Behavioral Health Services, said the reservation has only three treatment centers that can work with meth addicts. But she said those facilities already are struggling to deal with alcoholics and those addicted to other drugs.

Cindy Schaider, coordinator of Casa Grande Alliance, a coalition for substance abuse prevention, said her community can use all the help it can get to fight meth.

Young people in rural Arizona are at greater risk of using meth, a survey conducted by the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission suggests. The 2006 Arizona Youth Survey found that eighth-, 10th- and 12th-graders in rural counties were generally more likely than those in urban counties to have tried meth at some point.