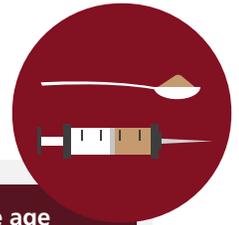


Opioid Abuse and Overdoses in San Diego County

According to recently released provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),¹ there were over 81,000 drug overdose deaths nationally between May 2019 and May 2020. While these numbers were increasing before the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDC notes there has been an acceleration of overdoses during the pandemic (driven primarily by synthetic opioids such as fentanyl) and that individuals with substance use disorders may be affected to a greater degree than others by it. Possible reasons for this increase could be stress and isolation of stay home orders, disrupted treatment experience (which could also be related to job loss and loss of insurance coverage), greater drug use alone rather than with others who would be able to respond or intervene, and decreased outreach and naloxone availability due to decreased contact with others. This CJ Flash highlights data available about local opioid abuse and overdoses through 2019 from both the SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program that involves interviews with local arrestees, as well as the County of San Diego Department of the Medical Examiner.



Highlight 1

Around 1 in 10 adult arrestees tested positive for an opioid in 2019, with females (15%) slightly more likely to test positive than males (11%). While opioids were not the drug of choice for most arrestees, the percent positive has roughly doubled since 2000, when they were 7% and 6%, respectively. Part of this increase appears to be driven by prescription drug abuse, especially by younger arrestees. Since 2007, the percent of adults between 18 and 24 that was positive tripled (4% to 12%) and those 25 to 39 doubled (8% to 16%), but the percent positive who were 40 years and older remained unchanged (8%). Almost 1 in 3 (31%) arrestees who reported using heroin said they were hooked on prescription drugs first.

15% of adult females and **11%** of adult males tested positive for an opioid in 2019

Arrestees **under the age of 40** more likely to be positive for an opioid and report ever abusing a prescription painkiller

Around **1 in 3 (31%)** arrestees who report using heroin said they abused prescription drugs first

Of those who abused prescription drugs before they began using heroin, **85%** said they switched looking for a substitute, because heroin was cheaper and/or easier to obtain

Highlight 2

According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times more potent than heroin. In 2019, the percent of arrestees who said they would use a drug if they knew it contained fentanyl went down, compared to 2018 (to 11%, from 31%), but more than 1 in 4 arrestees (27%) said they had used a drug that they thought had contained fentanyl, just because of the unexpected side effects they experienced. According to the 2020 San Diego County Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force Report Card,² there were 151 unintentional fentanyl deaths in the County in 2019, up from 92 in 2018.

151 unintentional fentanyl deaths in 2019
27% of arrestees think drug they used contained fentanyl
11% of arrestees would use a drug if they knew it contained fentanyl

Highlight 3

Just over 1 in 5 (22%) of the arrestees reported they had ever overdosed on a drug and of those who had ever overdosed on heroin or another opioid, 56% reported they had been administered naloxone, a medication designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. New questions added to the SAM interview instrument in 2019 showed that about half (48%) had been administered naloxone more than once, it was most often administered by friends (only one-third said it was administered by Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or law enforcement), and most (67%) knew how to obtain it. According to the 2020 Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force Report Card, naloxone was administered over 2,500 times in 2019 by EMS and the Sheriff's Department, an average of 7 times per day.

56%
of those who had overdosed on an opioid administered naloxone

52% got it once
17% twice
31% three or more times

Top 3 Providers:

- Friends (54%)
- EMS (25%)
- Family (21%)

67%
knew where to get naloxone

¹ [cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p12118-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p12118-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html)

² https://60dbe6f4-d228-4604-82d3-23ff51b117fa.filesusr.com/ugd/6b5bbf_000e9bc0f4dd4f34bc0c2d3acfb1171e.pdf