

**SANDAG**

**CJBRIEF**

Research findings from  
the Criminal Justice  
Clearinghouse

**2022**

# Methamphetamine Use by San Diego County Arrestees

Data from the SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring program

September 2023

Free Language Assistance | Ayuda gratuita con el idioma | Libreng Tulong sa Wika  
Hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí | 免费语言协助 | 免費語言協助 | مساعدة لغوية مجانية | 무료 언어 지원 | کمک زبان رایگان  
無料の言語支援 | Бесплатная языковая помощь | Assistència lingüística gratuïta | मुफ्त भाषा सहायता  
Assistance linguistique gratuite | ជំនួយភាសាឥតគិតថ្លៃ | ఉచిత భాషా సహాయం | ການຊ່ວຍເຫຼືອດ້ານພາສາ  
Kaalmada Luqadda ee Bilaashka ah | Безкоштовна мовна допомога



[SANDAG.org/LanguageAssistance](https://www.sandag.org/LanguageAssistance) | 619.699.1900

# Introduction

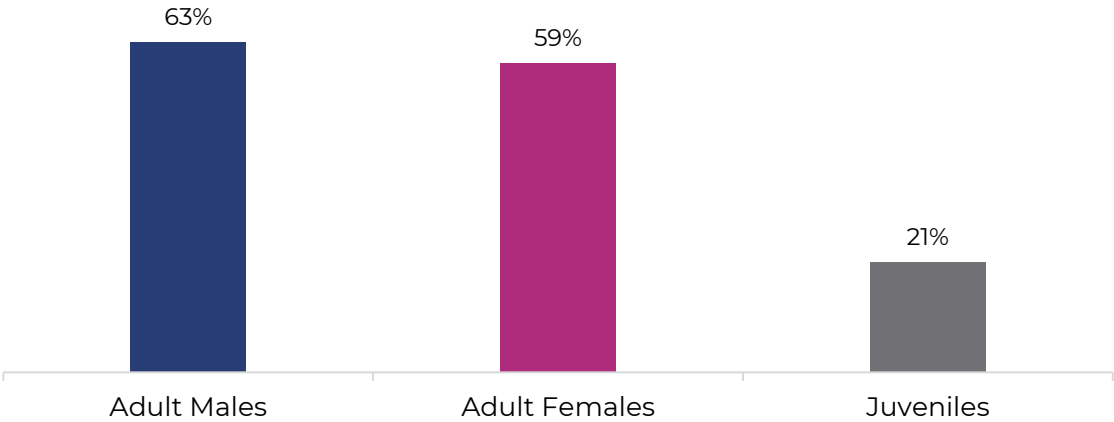
Since 1987, SANDAG has conducted interviews with randomly selected adult and juvenile arrestees regarding drug use and other risky behavior as part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program. Among other topics, participants in the survey are specifically asked about the use of methamphetamine (meth) and various additional questions as part of an addendum. The addendum was added to the original survey instrument because meth has consistently been one of the most commonly used illicit drugs by arrestees in San Diego County and because of the risk the drug poses to the user, children in the household, and the community in general. This SANDAG CJ Brief summarizes what these individuals shared during their interview, including some quotes they provided at the conclusion of the conversation.

## Meth Use

In 2022, almost three out of five (59%) adult females and 63% of adult males had reported ever trying meth. Additionally, over one in five (21%) of juveniles reported ever trying it, a 3% increase from last year (Figure 1).

**“It’s the worst drug you can ever start doing.”**  
-- 59-year-old female

**Figure 1: Percent of arrestees who had ever tried meth in 2022**

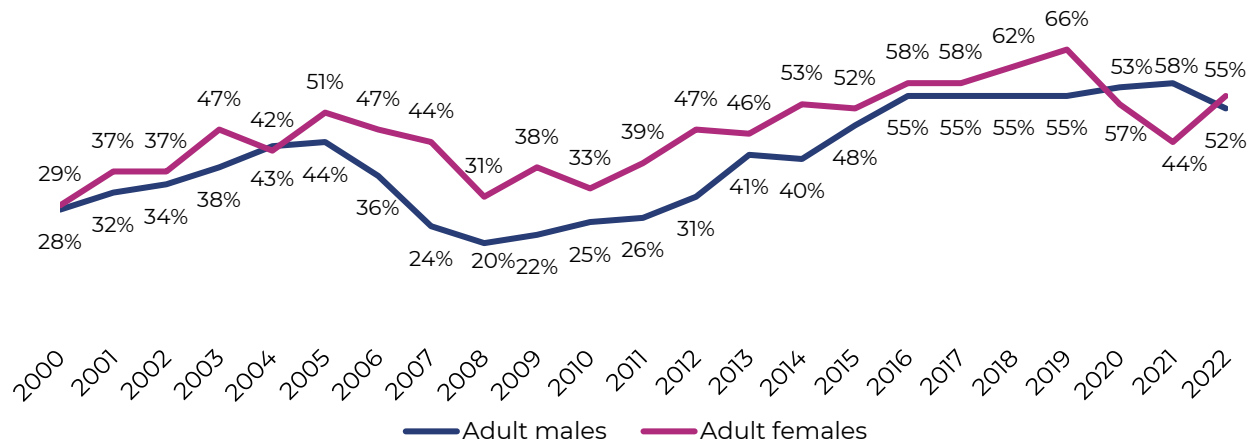


SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2022

An important component of the SAM project is voluntary drug testing. As shown in Figure 2, the percentage of adult males who tested positive for meth decreased from 58% in 2021 to 52% in 2022. On the contrary, the percentage of adult females who tested positive in 2022 (55%) represents an 11% increase from the previous year (44%) and notes a return toward pre-pandemic levels.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Due to COVID-19 protocols and a shift in intake procedures at the East Mesa Detention Facility, it became unfeasible to conduct drug testing for juveniles in 2022. Thus, juvenile positive meth rate data were excluded from Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Similar percentages of adult males and females positive for meth in 2022**



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2022

## Availability of Meth

Forty-one percent (41%) of arrestees in 2022 reported that meth was more available than the previous year and two in five (40%) reported that the price was lower. Moreover, almost half (49%) noted that the quality of meth was worse, a statistic that has stayed consistent with previous years (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Meth-using arrestee perceptions of meth availability, pricing, and quality in 2022**



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2022

Despite regional efforts to decrease meth use and its availability, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)<sup>2</sup> reports that meth continues to be readily available with high purity and potency in the United States. To further probe the availability of meth, a series of questions asked interviewees to describe their daily and monthly usage. When respondents were asked how many times they used meth in a typical day of using, the average (mean) number of times was about five. Interviewees were also asked what their longest usage streak was out of the typical 30 days in a month. The average streak of meth usage was around 17 days (Table 1).

**Table 1: Meth-using arrestees report using meth on average 5 times a day**

Method for obtaining meth	Pattern of use (on average)	Mode of use
<b>How do “typical” meth-using arrestees get the drug?</b>	<b>How often and how much do they use?</b>	<b>How do they use it?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>94%</b> purchased in San Diego County</li> <li>• <b>64%</b> have bought from someone they didn’t know</li> <li>• <b>40%</b> have a main source</li> <li>• <b>39%</b> usually buy from someone else when main source not available</li> <li>• <b>36%</b> have carried a weapon with them when they got meth</li> <li>• <b>28%</b> have sold meth or acted as a middleman in last year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use <b>5</b> times in a day when they use</li> <li>• Use <b>17</b> days in a row during longest run in past 30 days</li> <li>• Use <b>2</b> grams of meth each day they use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>75%</b> usually smoke it</li> <li>• <b>13%</b> usually snort it</li> <li>• <b>13 %</b> usually inject it</li> </ul>

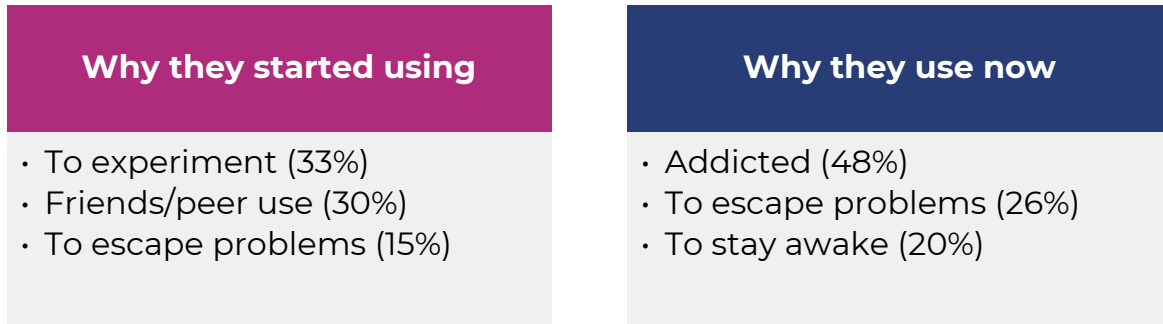
SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2022

## Motive for Meth Use

When meth-using arrestees were asked why they first started using meth, the most common reasons included that they were experimenting, their friends/peers were using it, or they wanted to escape their problems. When asked why they use it now, the most frequent reason was being addicted, followed by using it to escape problems, and to stay awake (Figure 4).

<sup>2</sup>Drug Enforcement Administration (March 2021). *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Available online: [https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/DIR-008-21%202020%20National%20Drug%20Threat%20Assessment\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/DIR-008-21%202020%20National%20Drug%20Threat%20Assessment_WEB.pdf)

**Figure 4: Top three reasons why arrestees began meth use and why they use it now**

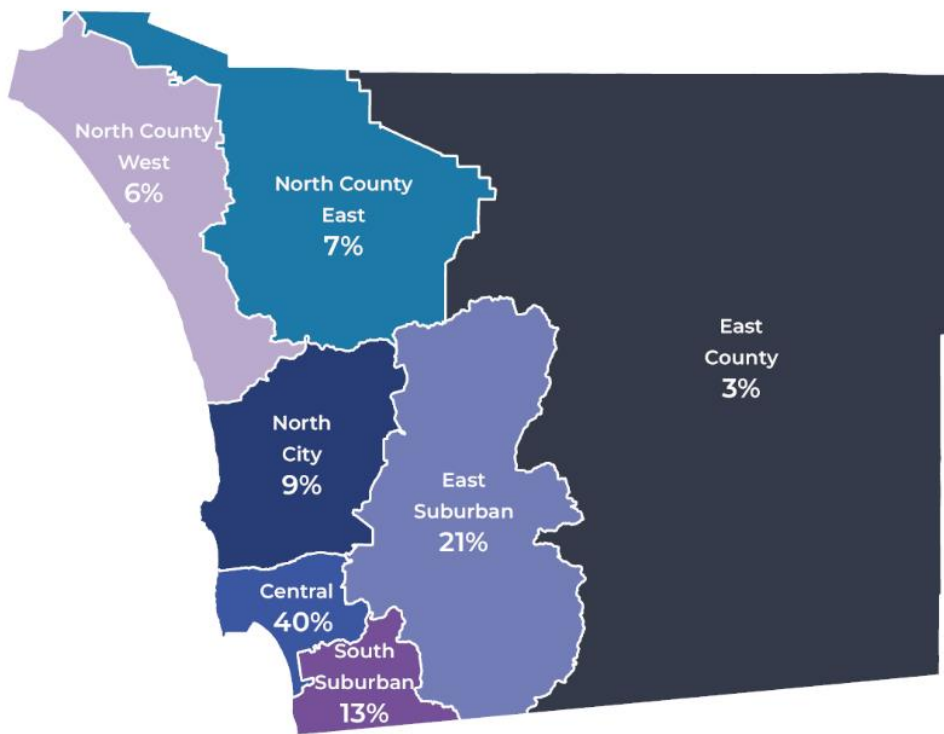


SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2022

### Location of Meth Purchase

In 2022, most arrestees reported buying meth in either the central, east suburban, or south suburban major statistical areas of the county (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Most meth purchased in the central area of the county**



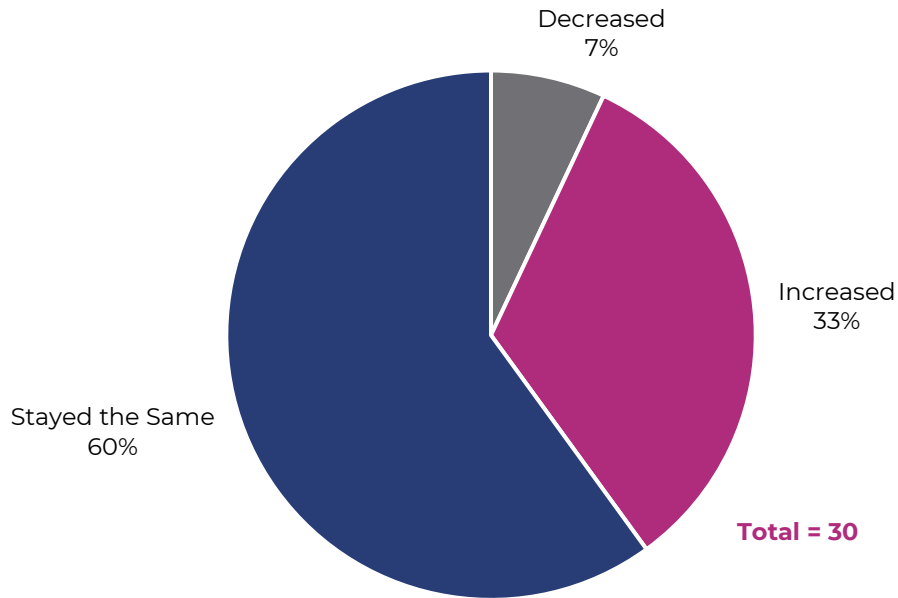
SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2022

## Demand For Meth

According to arrestees who engaged in distribution in the past 12 months (28%), one-third (33%) said the demand had increased in 2022 compared to the previous year. However, the majority stated that demand stayed the same (60%) (Figure 6).

**“Stay away from it. It ruins lives.”**  
-- 40-year-old male

**Figure 6: Meth-distributing arrestees’ perceptions of its demand**



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2022

Thirty-six percent (36%) of those employed or who were a student reported using meth before going to work or school. The most common job types reported by these arrestees were construction, food service, and mechanics.

## Study Background

This SANDAG CJ Brief, 2022 Methamphetamine Use by San Diego County Arrestees, is part of a series of reports highlighting findings from data collected as part of the SAM program. As part of this program, adult and juvenile arrestees are approached within 48 hours of their arrest (and booking) to participate in an interview regarding their drug use and other recent behaviors. Additionally, because the number of youths booked into East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility has considerably decreased in recent years, additional youth were interviewed at the San Diego Achievement Centers. In 2022, 208 male arrestees were interviewed at Central Jail or Vista Detention Facility and 97 female arrestees at Las Colinas Detention Facility. Of these 305 arrestees, 300 (98%) completed the interview and provided a valid urine sample for analysis. Within this sample, 112 (37%) reported having used meth in the past 30 days, including 75 (67%) males and 37 (33%) females.

**“It doesn’t lead you to anything good.”**

*-- 29-year-old male*

Of the 56 juveniles interviewed at East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility and San Diego Achievement Centers, two (4%) reported meth use in the past 30 days and both completed the addendum. These two youth included one boy and one girl.

## Acknowledgements

This effort would not be possible without the cooperation of the San Diego County Sheriff’s and Probation Departments, and the funding support of the Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), County of San Diego, and SANDAG member agencies. To learn more about the SAM program and to access other current reports, as well as aggregate data from the meth addendum, please visit [SANDAG.org/data-and-research/criminal-justice-and-public-safety/evaluation-services/drugs](https://sandag.org/data-and-research/criminal-justice-and-public-safety/evaluation-services/drugs)

## Recommended Citation

San Diego Association of Governments (2023). 2022 Methamphetamine Use by San Diego County Arrestees.

San Diego, CA: Author.