Heroin Use by San Diego County Arrestees

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the United States and around two in three (63%) overdoses were either due to prescription opioid painkillers or heroin in 2015.\(^1\) Other recent national statistics have shown that about one in four (23%) of those who use heroin develop an opiate addiction\(^1\) and that the economic cost of heroin drug use was around $78.5 billion in 2013 dollars.\(^2\) With parallel increases over the past two decades in the number of opiate prescriptions, drug treatment admissions, and drug overdose deaths, increased attention is being focused on how to address what many are now calling a public health emergency.\(^3\)

The President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis\(^4\) recently released a draft report outlining a number of recommendations, including increasing treatment capacity, supporting prescriber education initiatives, making naloxone (to reverse overdoses) more readily available, enhancing information sharing, supporting research, funding enforcement (especially efforts related to fentanyl), and developing targeted and effective prevention messages. With this issue of national concern, this CJ Flash highlights statistics compiled in 2016 from the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM)\(^5\) program related to heroin and other opioid use by local arrestees.

In 2016, 11 percent of adult arrestees were positive for opiates, with females significantly more likely to test positive (15%), compared to males (9%). These percentages were higher than in 2000, the baseline year for the project.

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\(^2\) [https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2017-opioids-infographics.pdf](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2017-opioids-infographics.pdf)

\(^3\) [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/ondcp/commission-interim-report.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/ondcp/commission-interim-report.pdf)

\(^4\) [https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/presidents-commission](https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/presidents-commission)

80% of these individuals said they switched to heroin as a substitute for the prescription drugs.
The most frequently abused prescription opiates that preceded heroin use:

- **69%** OxyContin
- **41%** Vicodin
- **39%** Percocet

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<th>Summary:</th>
<th>What we know about heroin and other opiate use from the 2016 adult SAM data</th>
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<td>More adults interviewed are testing positive for opiates, especially females</td>
<td>Arreestees were more likely to report heroin was easier to obtain in 2016 than 2015</td>
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<td>Younger adult arrestees are now more likely to use opiates than older arrestees</td>
<td>About 1 in 3 arrestees were hooked on prescription drugs prior to using heroin</td>
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<td>The most commonly abused prescription opiates were OxyContin, Vicodin, and Percocet</td>
<td>Among the arrestee population in San Diego County, a large percentage (almost 3 in 4) use opiates and meth</td>
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<td>Almost 1 in 2 of those who ever tried heroin reported they had been to the emergency room for a drug-related incident and 1 in 3 said they had ever overdosed</td>
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