

Drug Use Among Local Arrestees in 2019

Since 2000, SANDAG has conducted interviews in local detention facilities with individuals who were recently arrested and consent to participate in a confidential and anonymous interview. Because the collection of a urine sample is part of the interview, an objective drug measure is also available over time that supplements the self-report information. With the release of 20 years of data, this CJ Flash highlights some findings the interview, as well as a supplemental addendum regarding methamphetamine (meth) use, the drug of choice for San Diego County arrestees. The full reports are available at sandag.org/sam.

Highlight 1

Around 4 in 5 adult arrestees tested positive for at least one substance (marijuana, meth, opiates, cocaine/crack, and PCP) in 2019.

This was a 20-year high for both males (79%) and females (82%). The female rate was a new high and the rate for males was a high also seen in 2017. The lowest rates in the past 20 years was 56% for males in 2009 and 58% for females in 2008.



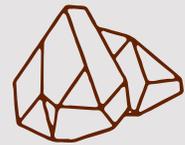
79% males

82% females

positive for an illicit substance in 2019, 20-year highs

Highlight 2

Meth continued to be the drug of choice for adult arrests, with 55% of males and 66% of females positive for it. These rates were also 20-year highs.



1 in 2 males (55%)
and **2 in 3** (66%)
females positive for
meth in 2019

Used meth
a median of
15 years

Used a mean of
18.7 days
in the past 30

53%
said the price of
meth was lower in
2019 than 2018

53%
said the demand
had increased in the
past year

48%
say it was very
easy to obtain

Highlight 3

Around 1 in 3 (36%) arrestees tested positive for multiple drugs, most often meth and marijuana.

Additional analyses of these poly-drug users revealed that property offenders and those who identified as White made up a greater proportion of those positive for multiple drugs. These poly-drug users were also younger, on average, when they were first arrested and more likely to report a history of involvement in drug distribution, have committed a crime to support their drug habit, have a history of mental health issues, and to have ever been homeless.

	Positive Multiple Drugs	Positive One Drug	Not Positive
Arrested for a property offense	20%	12%	13%
White	59%	44%	45%
Mean age at first arrest	21.2	22.3	26.0
Ever sold drugs	58%	37%	27%
Ever committed a crime to support drug use	45%	28%	17%
Ever had a mental health diagnosis	44%	32%	25%
Ever homeless	79%	64%	39%

Highlight 4

Almost 1 in 5 (18%) reported they had ever been approached to bring drugs across the U.S.-Mexico border and almost half (49%) of these individuals said that they ever had.

Two-thirds (65%) of those who had brought drugs across the border said they did because someone had paid them to do so. When asked what drugs they brought across the border, the three most included heroin (47%), meth (42%), and marijuana (24%). Arrestees positive for meth were significantly more likely to report being approached to carry drugs across, compared to those who were not (23% versus 11%).

18%

of arrestees
approached
to bring drugs
across the
border

49% of those approached brought drugs across the border

65% of those who have brought drugs across the border did so because someone paid them

23% of meth positive arrestees have been approached to carry drugs, compared to 11% of those not positive