Atlanta Metro
Sentinel Community Site (SCS)
Drug Use Patterns and Trends, 2019

November 2019

NDEWS Coordinating Center
A unique feature of NDEWS is its capability to describe and compare drug use patterns and trends in selected communities across the United States. The NDEWS Coordinating Center works closely with Sentinel Community Epidemiologists (SCEs) in 12 Sentinel Community Sites (SCSs) across the U.S. Emerging drugs and changing drug trends are monitored by each local SCE utilizing indicators such as drug overdose deaths, treatment admissions, hospital cases, poison center exposure calls, and law enforcement seizures. In May 2019, each SCE was asked to review available indicators and identify up to five drugs they considered most important to summarize for their site and include in their 2019 annual Drug Use Patterns and Trends Report.

Sentinel Community Epidemiologists (SCEs)

**Atlanta Metro**
Brian J. Dew, PhD
Dept of Counseling and Psychological Svcs
Georgia State University
Phone: 404-413-8168
bdew@gsu.edu

**Chicago Metro**
Lawrence J. Ouellet, PhD
School of Public Health
University of Illinois at Chicago
Phone: 312-355-0145
ljoo@uic.edu

**Denver Metro**
Marion Rorke, MPH
Dept of Public Health and Environment
City and County of Denver
Phone: 720-865-5453
marion.rorke@denvergov.org

**Wayne County (Detroit Area)**
Cynthia L. Arfken, PhD
Dept of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences
Wayne State University
Phone: 313-993-3490
cynthia.arfken@wayne.edu

**Los Angeles County**
Mary-Lynn Brecht, PhD
Integrated Substance Abuse Programs
University of California at Los Angeles
Phone: 310-983-1196
lbrecht@ucla.edu

**Maine**
Marcella H. Sorg, PhD, RN
Rural Drug and Alcohol Research Program
University of Maine
Phone: 207-581-2596
mhsorg@maine.edu

**Southeastern Florida (Miami Area)**
Ben Hackworth, MPH
Commission on Behavioral Health & Drug Prevention
United Way of Broward County
Phone: 954-453-3740
bhackworth@unitedwaybroward.org

**New York City**
Denise Paone, EdD
Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use Prevention, Care and Treatment
New York City Dept of Health & Mental Hygiene
Phone: 347-396-7015
dpaone@health.nyc.gov

**Philadelphia**
Suet T. Lim, PhD
City of Philadelphia
Dept of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services
Community Behavioral Health
Phone: 215-413-7165
suet.lim@phila.gov

**San Francisco**
Phillip O. Coffin, MD, MIA
San Francisco Dept of Public Health
Phone: 415-437-6282
phillip.coffin@sfdph.org

**King County (Seattle Area)**
Caleb Banta-Green, PhD, MSW, MPH
Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute
University of Washington
Phone: 206-685-3919
calebbg@u.washington.edu

**Texas**
Jane C. Maxwell, PhD
School of Social Work
The University of Texas at Austin
Phone: 512-556-3361
cmaxwell@austin.utexas.edu
Highlights

• Multiple methamphetamine data indicators have reached record levels, indicating increased use of the drug (NFLIS, treatment, and Georgia Medical Examiner data).

• Methamphetamine is no longer confined to Atlanta’s white population and is spreading into the local African American community.

• Heroin indicators are mixed. Treatment admissions are at the highest level on record for Atlanta (6.0%). Statewide deaths with heroin on board are at a four year low. The percentage of NFLIS reports are at a five year low.

• Once dominant in Atlanta, the use of cocaine/crack is stable at rates below methamphetamine. Users are the oldest of any cohort, most likely to be African American, and smoking. There has been a slight decrease in Georgia Medical Examiner data from a 10-year high in 2017.

• The market for marijuana in Atlanta has changed more drastically than any local drug market, with significantly less statewide production and greater reliance on high-level THC oils transported from the West.

• All major drug indicators for alprazolam and other benzodiazepines are down in 2018 compared with the previous four years. The existence of alprazolam in the Georgia mortality data reached its lowest level since 2008. Still the drug most likely consumed by females, a greater percentage of treatment admissions were 25 years or younger than at any time in the last 10 years.

• The rise of prescription opiate use, witnessed between 2011 and 2016, has now leveled off with multiple indicators reflecting a decrease in 2018 compared with the previous two years.
• Largest percentage of methamphetamine-related NFLIS drug reports on record.

• Local NFLIS methamphetamine-related trend is supported by 2018 treatment data (12% of all primary treatment admissions are methamphetamine-related, which is equivalent to the previous 2005 high of 12.2%).

• Supports ethnographic reports of increasing supply of methamphetamine in Atlanta.

Note: NFLIS reports for 2018 are extrapolated from 1H 2018 data.

Source: NFLIS, DEA

• The number of statewide decedents testing positive for methamphetamine at the time of death in 2018 is at an all-time high.

• Supports multiple retail level reporting that increasing amounts of fentanyl are being mixed and distributed in Atlanta’s methamphetamine supply, and this addition is typically unknown to the buyer/user.

Source: Georgia Medical Examiner’s Office
• Atlanta has lower rates of heroin use than any other major US city; 6% of total primary treatment admissions are for heroin.
• Heroin-related NFLIS data in 2018 is half of the total number in 2015.
• Users continued to be increasingly white; younger than 35 years old.
• Ethnographic reports cite an increasing supply of Mexican heroin into the metro Atlanta area.

Note: NFLIS reports for 2018 are extrapolated from 1H 2018 data.

Source: NFLIS, DEA
• Users are most likely to be African American, greater than 45 years, and smoke.

• Cocaine-related calls to the Georgia Poison Control Center typically exceed methamphetamine and “molly” calls in metro Atlanta.

• NFLIS indicates stable percentages of cocaine-related reports for the past 5 years.

Source: Georgia Poison Control Center

• Increased prevalence of stimulants on board among Georgia decedents. The increase in cocaine-related reports parallels the increased use of amphetamine and methamphetamine.

• Local DEA officials describe the supply of cocaine in Atlanta to be the most stable/consistent than any other major drug. Neither crack/cocaine HCL prices nor purity rates have fluctuated significantly in the last 5 years.

Source: Georgia Medical Examiner’s Office

Crack and Cocaine HCL

Number of Atlanta-Based Drug Calls to GA Poison Control (2012-2018)

Number of Decedents with Select Drugs on Board at Death (2007-2018)
Benzodiazepines

- All major drug indicators suggest a decrease in benzodiazepine use in metro Atlanta, compared to the previous 5-6 years.
- Public treatment data suggest the lowest primary admissions for benzodiazepines in the past 10 years.
- Benzodiazepines continue to be the one drug most often abused by females and increased use among persons < 26 years old is reported (based on treatment data and ethnographic reports).
- Xanax on board among Georgia decedents is at the lowest point since 2008.

SOURCE: Georgia Medical Examiner’s Office
## Treatment Tables
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>2014 (#)</th>
<th>2014 (%)</th>
<th>2015 (#)</th>
<th>2015 (%)</th>
<th>2016 (#)</th>
<th>2016 (%)</th>
<th>2017 (#)</th>
<th>2017 (%)</th>
<th>2018 (#)</th>
<th>2018 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Admissions (#)</td>
<td>20,855</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>17,419</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>18,915</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>20,947</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Substance of Abuse (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>8,800</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>7,184</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>8,029</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>8,499</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine/Crack</td>
<td>2,829</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>1,721</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>2,025</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>1,001</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription Opioids</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>1,314</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methamphetamine</td>
<td>1,193</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>1,256</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>2,017</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>2,468</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana**</td>
<td>4,017</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>3,483</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>3,837</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>4,331</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benzodiazepines</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDMA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>&lt;0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthetic Stimulants</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthetic Cannabinoids**</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Drugs/Unknown</td>
<td>2,635</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>2,109</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>unavail</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:**

^Atlanta MSA: Includes the following 29 counties—Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dawson, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Haralson, Heard, Henry, Jasper, Lamar, Meriwether, Morgan, Newton, Paulding, Pickens, Pike, Rockdale, Spalding, and Walton.

*Admissions: Includes admissions to publicly funded programs. Each admission does not necessarily represent a unique individual because some individuals are admitted to treatment more than once in a given period.

**Marijuana/Synthetic Cannabinoids: The data do not differentiate between marijuana and synthetic cannabinoids.

unavail: Data not available.

**SOURCE:** Data provided to the Atlanta Metro NDEWS SCE by the Georgia Department of Human Resources.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Substance</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Cocaine/Crack</th>
<th>Heroin</th>
<th>Prescription Opioids</th>
<th>Methamphetamine</th>
<th>Marijuana**</th>
<th>Benzo-diazepines</th>
<th>Synthetic Stimulants</th>
<th>Synthetic Cannabinoids**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Admissions (#)</td>
<td>8,499</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>2,025</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1,314</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (%)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5,292</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>1,158</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3,207</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>867</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity (%)</td>
<td>White, Non-Hisp.</td>
<td>3,759</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>1,024</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African-Am/Black, Non-Hisp</td>
<td>4,267</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>1,534</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group (%)</td>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26-44</td>
<td>3,806</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>4,024</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>1,079</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route of Administration (%)</td>
<td>Smoked</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1,288</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inhaled</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Injected</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral/Other/Unknown</td>
<td>8,463</td>
<td>99.6%</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Substance (%)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3,818</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cocaine/Crack</td>
<td>1,670</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heroin</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prescription Opioids</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methamphetamine</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marijuana**</td>
<td>2,201</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benzodiazepines</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synthetic Stimulants</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synthetic Cannabinoids**</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*A Admissions: Includes admissions to publicly funded programs. Each admission does not necessarily represent a unique individual because some individuals are admitted to treatment more than once in a given period.

**Marijuana/Synthetic Cannabinoids**: The data do not differentiate between marijuana and synthetic cannabinoids.

n/a: Not applicable; unavail: Data not available; Percentages may not sum to 100 due to missing data, rounding, and/or because not all possible categories are presented in the table. Category frequencies may not sum to drug total due to missing data and/or not all possible categories are presented in the table.

SOURCE: Data provided to the Atlanta MSA by the Georgia Department of Human Resources.
DATA FOR THIS REPORT WERE DRAWN FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

**Forensic drug analysis** data came from the National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) and represent evidence seized in suspected drug cases throughout metropolitan Atlanta that were tested by the GBI Forensic Laboratory from 2011 to 1H2018. NFLIS methodology allows for the accounting of up to three drugs for each item submitted for analysis. The data presented are a combined count, including primary, secondary, and tertiary reports for each drug. Data for 1H2018 are preliminary and subject to change. NFLIS reports for 2018 are extrapolated from 1H 2018 data.

**Law enforcement reports of local drug use trends, prices, and availability** were obtained from officials at the Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). Annual meetings with HIDTA staff are supplemented with multiple telephone consultations throughout the year.

**Public substance abuse treatment admissions for 2018** have been provided by the Georgia Department of Human Resources.

**State drug-related mortality** data were obtained from the Georgia Medical Examiner’s Office. Data represent the number of postmortem specimens that tested positive for a particular drug and were collected from fiscal years 2007 through 2018.

**Poison exposure call** data were extracted using general terms from the Georgia Poison Control Center and represent the count of drug exposure calls by drug from 2012 to 2018.

For additional information about the drugs and drug use patterns discussed in this report, please contact Brian J. Dew, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Counseling and Psychological Services, Georgia State University, P.O. Box 3980, Atlanta, GA 30302, Phone: 404–413–8168, E-mail: bdew@gsu.edu.