



NATIONAL EMERGING THREATS INITIATIVE

Emerging Drug Threat Predictive Brief

The National Emerging Threats Initiative (NETI) strives to provide an early warning system for the United States via the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). It does so by observing multiple trend lines and using the data to predict what is coming next.

For the past decade, the opioid epidemic has dominated the nation's attention. The driving force was the radical expansion of prescription (Rx) opioids that began in 1996 with the marketing of OxyContin. Those drugs were later joined by illicit opioids expanding use.

- In mid-decade, opioid prescribing reached its peak and began falling in all but one of the 26 states' Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) NETI examined. At the same time, Rx opioid overdose (OD) deaths began reducing.
- Heroin use and OD deaths increased through most of the decade, reducing somewhat in 2019. Use was demonstrated by HIDTA law enforcement seizures and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. OD deaths were identified in the CDC Wonder system.
- Since mid-decade, fentanyl supplies have been rapidly increasing, as have OD deaths involving this drug and its analogs. Fentanyl is a very deadly opioid when used illicitly.

Stimulants have followed their own pattern. They began relatively low in use for the first half of the decade and then began to escalate.

- Cocaine use began rising in 2014, almost tripling in law enforcement seizures and OD Deaths by 2019.
- Methamphetamines began an extraordinarily rapid increase closer to the end of the decade. By 2019, law enforcement seizures and OD Deaths were almost ten times higher than in 2011.
- Prescribing of stimulant drugs increased across the decade, as shown in all but one of the 26 states PDMPs NETI examined and in non-medical use.

The outlook is that COVID19 increases drug abuse problems, as persons' lives have become much more stressful, and drug treatment programs have had to reduce in-person contacts. This is expected to slow-down the reductions of Rx opioid and heroin use and OD deaths until the pandemic is over. Then, the downward trends are expected to reassert.

Since persons continue to use Fentanyl in combination with other opioids and stimulants, the outlook for use and overdose deaths involving Fentanyl appears to increase.

Stimulants are clearly on the rise, so increased use and OD deaths must be anticipated.

Prevention and treatment efforts must focus on these drugs. Besides, every community must identify the specific drugs being abused and misused within their boundaries to concentrate their efforts.
