



NEWS RELEASE

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2020 Saw Significant Increase in Substance Use

Annual Report of Testing Outlines Drug Positivity Rates by Region; Alcohol, Cannabinoids and Methadone Among Biggest Jumps

RICHMOND, VA., (August 16, 2021) – The use of drugs and alcohol rose significantly throughout the United States in 2020 amid the global pandemic’s economic challenges and social isolation, according to a new report released today by Averhealth, a substance use monitoring company serving treatment courts, probation and social service agencies.

Positivity rates for alcohol rose 33 percent last year while the use of many illegal drugs also turned upward, according to an annual report of Averhealth’s testing results released at RISE21, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) conference on addiction, mental health and justice reform held at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in National Harbor, Md.

In combination with the report release, Gen. Barry McCaffrey (Ret.), an Averhealth board member and former Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, will be speaking at the event.

The report – based on Averhealth’s 550,000 active clients nationwide and 2,700 programs -- amplifies recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showing that more than 93,000 people died of a drug overdose nationwide last year — a record number.

“Our data found a significant increase in positivity rates across specific drug classes such as Methadone by 21 percent, Cannabinoids by 20 percent and Amphetamines by 18 percent, though other drugs saw a decline, including Opiates, Benzodiazepines and Cocaine,” said Jason Herzog, Averhealth CEO and co-founder. “This is a snapshot of the type of drugs people are using. These statistics tell a powerful story because behind the numbers are just everyday people with families and lives who unfortunately are struggling with addiction.”

Effects of COVID-19

Although Averhealth has not closed any of its patient care centers since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure clients receive the care they need, many probation and social service agencies have limited their frequency of drug testing. This has potentially impacted positivity rates across different drug classes and programs.

“Even with limited drug testing during this time, it is important to note the rise in positivity rates for specific substances such as alcohol, which has increased by a third since 2019,” Herzog said. “Assumptions can be made that increased use of alcohol correlated with the COVID-19 pandemic.”

While most businesses were closed due to social distancing and restrictions, liquor stores were given “essential business” recognition and remained open. Other substances may also have increased during this time due to availability and the recent legalization of Cannabinoids in many states.

“America must make it their mission to protect the vulnerable substance use disorder population during this time,” McCaffrey said. “When we are facing such a deadly disease, and we can’t afford to lose anyone else to a treatable one.”

McCaffrey has made it his mission to speak on addiction and the opioid crisis and is available virtually for interviews with the media and affiliations during the NADCP Conference from Aug. 16-18. Other accommodations can be made to schedule an interview with General McCaffrey during additional times upon request.

Regional statistics

Averhealth’s annual report showcases differences among regions of the country. Statistics in the report are from Averhealth’s testing and client information tracked in Aversys, its web-based application. The company has recorded data since 2014.

Meanwhile, positivity rates of drug tests continue to increase in many drug categories, according to the Averhealth report. This chart shows the positivity rate trends by region:

Midwest:

Kansas, Kentucky, Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri

Despite increases in positive tests for Alcohol, Amphetamines and others, many drug class positivity rates decreased for this region, including Cocaine, Benzodiazepines and Opiates.

Drug Class	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Alcohol	1.0%	2.4%	2.1%	2.1%	2.0%	1.9%	2.2%
Amphetamines	1.5%	3.0%	3.2%	3.5%	3.7%	4.1%	4.2%
Benzodiazepines	1.6%	3.0%	3.1%	2.9%	3.1%	2.5%	1.6%
Buprenorphine	3.9%	4.9%	7.0%	3.4%	8.6%	9.5%	10.6%

Cannabinoids							
Natural	3.6%	5.5%	6.2%	6.1%	6.6%	6.6%	5.6%
Cocaine	0.5%	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.5%
Fentanyl	-	1.6%	4.3%	1.7%	3.2%	2.1%	1.6%
Methadone	1.5%	0.4%	1.2%	1.6%	1.2%	0.8%	0.8%
Opiates	2.7%	4.0%	3.9%	3.0%	2.3%	1.9%	1.3%

Southeast:

Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia

In the Southeast region, most drug classes saw their positivity rates increase, including Fentanyl, Methadone, Cannabinoids and Amphetamines.

Drug Class	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Alcohol	8.3%	8.1%	5.2%	3.7%	4.1%	4.6%	5.1%
Amphetamines	1.3%	1.8%	1.7%	1.5%	3.4%	5.2%	6.2%
Benzodiazepines	3.4%	3.8%	1.3%	1.1%	1.4%	1.4%	1.5%
Buprenorphine	0.3%	0.4%	1.0%	4.4%	6.0%	15.2%	11.1%
Cannabinoids							
Natural	8.4%	7.2%	6.4%	6.2%	7.4%	7.9%	9.4%
Cocaine	1.7%	2.0%	2.0%	1.6%	2.2%	2.4%	2.4%
Fentanyl	-	-	-	0.5%	0.6%	0.7%	1.6%
Methadone	-	-	0.0%	0.1%	1.1%	1.5%	1.9%
Opiates	5.0%	6.1%	3.9%	2.7%	3.0%	3.2%	3.2%

West:

Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Washington

Positivity rates for Alcohol, Cannabinoids and Methadone rose the most in the West.

Drug Class	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Alcohol	1.9%	2.2%	2.4%	1.9%	2.4%	3.2%	5.1%
Amphetamines	5.0%	4.8%	5.1%	4.3%	4.4%	5.5%	6.6%
Benzodiazepines	2.2%	3.1%	2.5%	2.2%	1.7%	1.7%	1.5%
Buprenorphine	2.7%	3.9%	1.4%	2.8%	2.6%	11.1%	9.9%
Cannabinoids							
Natural	4.9%	5.2%	6.4%	6.9%	8.2%	8.6%	13.0%
Cocaine	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%
Fentanyl	0.4%	1.2%	1.8%	0.8%	2.1%	3.7%	3.7%
Methadone	0.2%	0.8%	2.5%	3.2%	1.4%	3.3%	4.1%
Opiates	3.2%	4.2%	3.5%	3.1%	2.7%	2.8%	2.6%

Southcentral:

Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

In the Southcentral Region, some of the drug classes experienced increase in positivity rates, including Fentanyl, Amphetamines and Cocaine while others had a decrease in their numbers.

Drug Class	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Alcohol	2.3%	5.7%	6.3%	5.0%	5.1%	5.3%
Amphetamines	0.8%	3.1%	3.3%	3.6%	3.4%	3.9%
Benzodiazepines	1.6%	1.6%	2.1%	1.8%	1.4%	1.3%
Buprenorphine	-	-	-	-	36.6%	17.9%
Cannabinoids						
Natural	3.8%	9.4%	9.9%	10.1%	9.3%	10.0%
Cocaine	1.4%	1.7%	1.5%	1.4%	1.5%	1.7%
Fentanyl	-	-	-	-	0.4%	0.5%
Methadone	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%
Opiates	0.9%	2.5%	2.6%	2.5%	2.1%	1.9%

Great Lakes:

Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin

This region saw the largest increase in positive tests for Alcohol, Cannabinoids and Amphetamines.

Drug Class	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Alcohol	0.3%	0.5%	0.9%	0.9%	1.8%	1.7%	3.2%
Amphetamines	2.6%	2.0%	2.8%	3.7%	4.9%	7.9%	10.4%
Benzodiazepines	1.6%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%	1.6%	1.6%
Buprenorphine	-	4.4%	5.1%	9.3%	13.6%	11.8%	11.6%
Cannabinoids							
Natural	8.0%	8.5%	10.1%	9.3%	9.8%	17.6%	26.1%
Cocaine	2.1%	2.0%	3.1%	3.5%	3.4%	4.8%	5.5%
Fentanyl	-	-	0.2%	2.1%	2.4%	3.5%	3.4%
Methadone	-	-	8.0%	3.5%	9.1%	17.5%	17.0%
Opiates	4.4%	4.6%	4.6%	4.3%	3.7%	4.1%	3.8%

Northeast:

Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont

Some drug classes experienced increase in positivity rates, including Alcohol, Fentanyl and Cannabinoids while others saw a decrease such as Opiates, Cocaine and Benzodiazepines.

Drug Class	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
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Alcohol	0.9%	1.3%	3.3%	4.0%	4.1%	4.1%	4.8%
Amphetamines	0.6%	1.2%	2.6%	3.1%	3.8%	4.5%	4.6%
Benzodiazepines	0.8%	1.4%	2.7%	3.5%	3.1%	2.7%	2.5%
Buprenorphine	0.9%	0.6%	16.2%	18.0%	24.2%	25.6%	25.7%
Cannabinoids							
Natural	1.8%	2.0%	7.5%	12.3%	15.8%	20.7%	22.9%
Cocaine	0.3%	0.4%	1.3%	2.1%	2.4%	1.9%	1.7%
Fentanyl	0.0%	-	3.2%	2.6%	3.0%	2.4%	2.8%
Methadone	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%	2.6%	7.0%	9.8%	10.5%
Opiates	1.0%	1.9%	2.7%	2.3%	1.8%	1.4%	1.2%

ABOUT AVERHEALTH

Since 1995, Averhealth has specialized in providing substance use monitoring services tailored to the unique needs of judicial programs that operate at the holistic intersection of justice-involved and behavioral health. Today, Averhealth serves more than 550,000 clients nationwide. Every element of the Averhealth solution incorporates evidence-based practices, positioning programs and clients for the best possible outcome. Random selection, daily engagement, robust sample collection, and next business day results combine to help clients develop coping and refusal skills to new-use events. With Averhealth's agile and easy-to-navigate software and automation tools, it streamlines your daily workflow and ultimately supports recovery. For more information, please visit: www.averhealth.com.

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