

Drop in illicit drug use in cities, uptick in prescription drug abuse

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ER visits from street drugs declined 8 percent in 3-year period, study found.

(HealthDay)—Illicit drug use has declined in most large U.S. cities in recent years, but prescription drug abuse has increased, a new study shows.

Researchers analyzed data on drug-abuse related visits to emergency departments in 11 major [metropolitan areas](#) and some smaller urban areas over three years, 2007-2009. The data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network was separated into two types of drug abuse: [prescription drugs](#) such as the [pain medication](#) OxyContin and illegal street drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

In 2007, illicit drug abuse accounted for more [emergency department](#) visits than prescription drug abuse, 36 percent vs. 20 percent, for all [metro areas](#) except the Phoenix region.

Rates of visits for street drug abuse in the metropolitan areas varied

considerably more than for prescription drug abuse. In general, visits for prescription drug abuse rates were more consistent among the metropolitan areas but there were a few spikes, with higher rates in Houston (33 percent) and Phoenix (27 percent).

From 2007 to 2009, there was an 8 percent decline in overall emergency department visits for street drug abuse, while overall visits for prescription drug abuse increased 2 percent.

Overall rates of visits for street drug abuse were 36 percent in 2007, 32 percent in 2008, and 28 percent in 2009. Rates for prescription drug abuse were 20 percent in 2007, 21 percent in 2008 and 22 percent in 2009.

The total number of visits for both types of drug abuse were 301,000 in 2007, 352,000 in 2008 and 280,000 in 2009, according to the study to be presented Monday at the annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, in Washington, D.C.

"The harsh reality is prescription drug abuse has become a growing problem in our society," study author Dr. Asokumar Buvanendran, a professor in the anesthesiology department at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, said in a society news release.

"We hope the results of this study will aid physicians in effectively treating patients who struggle with prescription [drug abuse](#), as well as encourage widespread patient education about the safe use, storage and disposal of medications," Buvanendran added.

Because this study was presented at a medical meeting, the data and conclusions should be viewed as preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more about [prescription drug abuse](#).

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