

Annual UK deaths related to heroin and morphine continue to drop significantly, report finds

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Annual deaths related to heroin and morphine are continuing to drop significantly, falling from 41 per cent of total drug-related deaths in the UK in 2010 to 32 per cent in 2011. Meanwhile, deaths from 'legal highs' – some of which have now been banned – remained steady following a large increase in the previous year.

In total, UK drug-related deaths fell by seven per cent from 1,883 in 2010 to 1,757 in 2011, as revealed today (28 February) in the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths (np-SAD) 2012 report. This continues a two-year [downward trend](#) that saw deaths fall by 14 per cent from 2009 to 2010.

Although deaths related to [heroin](#) and [morphine](#) are falling year by year (in 2009 they accounted for 53 per cent of the total) in 2011 they remained the drugs responsible for most deaths. However, deaths related to [methadone](#) rose by four per cent to 31 per cent from 2010 to 2011, and deaths involving other opiates – drugs derived from the opium poppy plant, many of which are available on prescription as painkillers – rose by six per cent to 28 per cent.

A group of former '[legal highs](#)' that was banned in 2010 – the methcathinones, which include mephedrone – was involved in 21 deaths in 2011. This was down from 31 in 2010, although this had followed a steep rise from five in 2009. As deaths from methcathinones declined

following the ban, deaths from emerging [new drugs](#) such as amphetamine-type substances, [benzodiazepines](#) and tryptamines – as well as other now-banned drugs such as benzofurans – rose, from four altogether in 2010 to 22 in 2011.

A slight decline in deaths observed in 2010 from [stimulants](#) such as cocaine, amphetamines and [ecstasy](#)-type substances was reversed in 2011, with a small rise. Deaths involving cocaine rose from 8.7 to 9.2 per cent of the total, [amphetamines](#) from 2.9 to 3.7 per cent, and ecstasy-type drugs from 0.6 to 1.7 per cent.

The np-SAD report was compiled by the International Centre for Drug Policy at St George's, University of London. It outlines drug-related deaths occurring in 2011 that have been formally investigated. It details where a type of drug is involved in a death, either on its own or in combination with another substance, and includes regional breakdowns.

The report contains information reported by coroners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man, as well as police forces in Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Professor Fabrizio Schifano, acting director of the ICDP at St George's, University of London and professor of clinical pharmacology at the University of Hertfordshire, said: "Whilst an overall decline in drug-related deaths in the UK is indeed excellent news, further monitoring of the situation needs to happen over the next few years. Particular attention needs to be paid to both the emerging issues of novel psychoactive substances, which are commonly known as 'legal highs', and the increasing concern relating to prescription drugs' misuse and related fatalities."

The number of deaths in England was down to 1,263 in 2011 from 1,358

in 2010. In Scotland, deaths fell from 365 to 336, in Northern Ireland they were down to 70 from 72, and in Wales 81 were reported in 2011 – the same as in 2010.

The demographics of the deceased were consistent with previous years, with the majority of overall UK deaths being of males, at 72 per cent. Most people were under 45 years old (66 per cent), and white (97 per cent).

Most of the deaths were the result of an accidental overdose, up to 70 per cent from 64 per cent in 2010.

During 2011, the City of Manchester coroner recorded the highest proportion of deaths in the country, with 15 per 100,000 people aged 16 and over. In previous years, Brighton and Hove has had the highest [death](#) rate consistently, but in 2011 this dropped significantly, from 15 per 100,000 in 2010 to nine.

More information: [www.sgul.ac.uk/media/np-sad201...
eb28thmastercopy.pdf](http://www.sgul.ac.uk/media/np-sad201...eb28thmastercopy.pdf)

Provided by St. George's University of London

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