

Heroin/opiate abuse maintains grip in Twin Cities

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Opiates second only to alcohol as reason for treatment admissions

The abuse of heroin and prescription opiates continues to rise in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area, according to a new report on Twin Cities' drug abuse trends released recently by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

One in five admissions to addiction treatment programs in 2011 was for heroin or other opiates, second only to treatment admissions for alcohol. Heroin accounted for 10.7 percent of addiction treatment admissions in 2011, compared to 3.3 percent in 2000. Other opiates, mostly prescription painkillers, accounted for 9.5 percent of treatment admissions in 2011, compared to 1.4 percent in 2000. Opiates were detected in 7.7 percent of adult males arrested in Hennepin County in 2011, compared to 4.7 percent in 2007. The use of synthetic chemical compounds for their hallucinogenic drug-like effects also increased in 2011. Hennepin Regional Poison Center saw a marked increase in reported incidents involving THC homologs, "fake pot" sold as herbal incense, phenylethylamines such as 2C-E, sold as "research chemicals," and various chemical compounds sold as "bath salts."

"That opiate treatment admissions are second only to alcohol admissions is unprecedented and should be of great concern," said Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson. "It is imperative that communities educate themselves, embrace prevention efforts and become part of the solution in reversing these trends."

The number of bath salt exposures reported to the Hennepin Regional Poison Center grew from five in 2010 to 144 in 2011.

Carol Falkowski, DHS drug abuse strategy officer, has prepared the report on drug abuse trends twice annually since 1986. The report is done as part of a national epidemiological drug abuse monitoring network composed of drug abuse researchers in 20 U.S. cities and convened by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. A copy of the report is available on the DHS website.

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