

# Substance Abuse Trends Alert!

**FADAA**  
FLORIDA ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE ASSOCIATION  
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## Is There a Stimulant Epidemic on Florida's Horizon?

### Emerging National and International Concerns

The illicit use of stimulants like methamphetamine, cocaine and Adderall and Ritalin prescriptions is increasing nationally says National Emerging Threat Initiative Coordinator, John Eadie. He [notes](#) that these drugs are cheap,

potent, and plentiful and that for every kilogram of heroin seized over the last 5 years, drug enforcement agents seized 15 kilograms of stimulants. ([Medscape, April 4, 2018](#)).

Data from law enforcement agencies, prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) and public health agencies indicate that both the supply and demand for stimulants has increased nationally. According to data from eleven state PDMPs, prescriptions for opioids and other non-stimulant drugs peaked between 2011 and 2015 while prescriptions for stimulants have steadily increased each year (Eadie 2018). Based on reports from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), demand for types of illicit drugs is also changing ([Eadie, 2018](#)). Between 2010 and 2015, the number of people abusing both legal and illicit stimulants had increased more rapidly than the number of people abusing opioids. Finally, reports indicate that there has been a five-year national rise in cocaine-related deaths that also involved opioids. During the same time, deaths involving only cocaine remained stable. A similar epidemic has been recognized for several

years in China, a country that has become a major producer and consumer of illicit amphetamine-type substances (ATS). The Brookings Institution reported in 2014 that the share of heroin users among all Chinese drug users has been declining steadily "while the use of so-called 'new drugs' (methamphetamine, ecstasy, and ketamine) has become something of a fashion

among Chinese urban youth" ([Brookings 2014](#)). Chinese-produced ATS have spread throughout Southeast Asia. As illustrated in Figure 1, the supply appears plentiful enough to impact the market in North America in what is increasingly a worldwide market for stimulants.

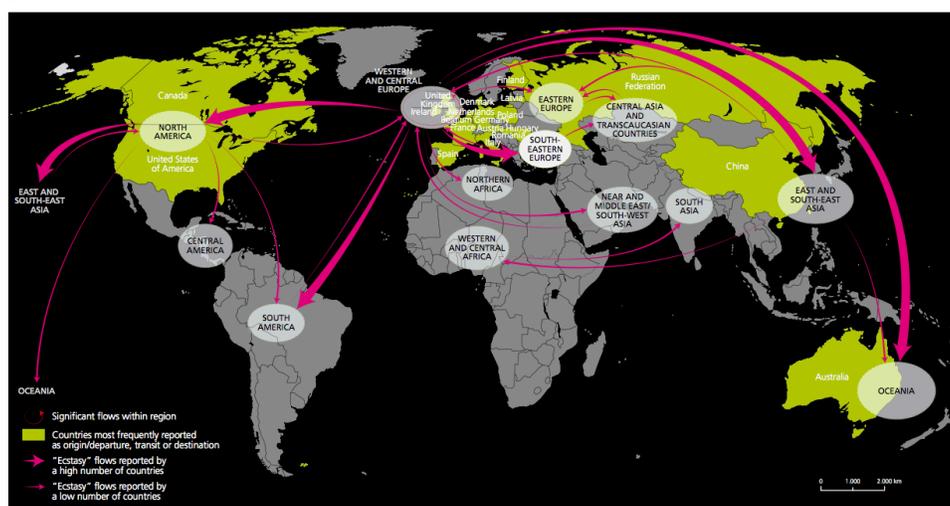


Figure 1: Worldwide Trafficking in Methamphetamines  
Source: [World Drug Report, 2017](#) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Meanwhile, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that Colombia remains the primary source of supply for cocaine in the United States. Elevated levels of coca cultivation and north-bound movement from there indicate that more cocaine is available for traffickers should they wish to re-enter the U.S. cocaine market ([DEA, 2016](#)). Still, as of 2016, various national and regional measures of use tracked by the DEA have not surged back to levels observed a decade earlier. This is reflected in [National Survey on Drug Use and Health \(NSDUH\) data](#) report-ed in 2017.

### What Does the Data Say about Stimulant Use in Florida?

Medical Examiners [data](#) show that cocaine related deaths are on the rise in Florida as is the case for the

nation. The [2017 Florida Medical Examiners Interim Report](#), published in April 2018, noted that cocaine caused more deaths than any other substance during the first half of 2017. It also noted that compared to the first six months of 2016, occurrences of cocaine increased by 36 percent (418 more) and deaths caused by cocaine increased by 59 percent (383 more).

[NSDUH](#) 2015-2016 data estimate that 1.63% of all Floridians over age 12 used cocaine at least once in the preceding year. Among those ages 12-17, a category that mirrors the [Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey](#) population, less than half of 1% reported such use. But among young adults age 18-25 the percentage was 5.35%, the highest of any age group. Figure 2 displays the number of deaths caused by cocaine in the first half of 2017 ([Florida Medical Examiners Interim Report](#))

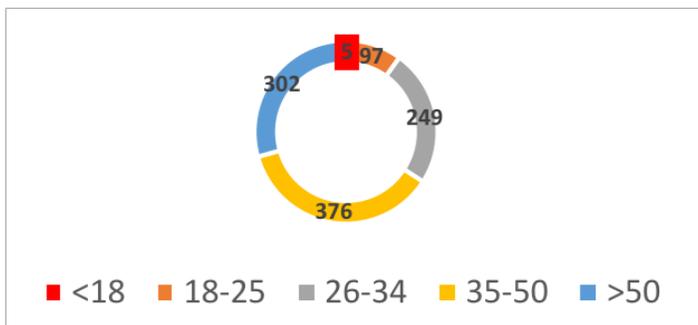


Figure 2: Cocaine-Caused Deaths by Age of Decedent Florida, January-June 2017  
Source: [2017 Medical Examiners Interim Report](#)

and shows that relatively few deaths occurred among persons under age 25. Thus, it appears that cocaine experimentation among Florida youth is primarily a post high school phenomenon of young adulthood with fatal consequences occurring among users later in life.

The 2017 Medical Examiners' Interim [Report](#) also shows increases in other stimulant occurrence and deaths during this time: Occurrences of methamphetamine rose 72 percent and deaths rose 84 percent while amphetamine occurrences rose 47 percent and amphetamine deaths rose 54 percent.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, cathinone occurrences rose 38 percent and cathinone caused deaths rose 55 percent.

<sup>1</sup> The report notes that because methamphetamine rapidly metabolizes to amphetamine, many of the amphetamine-related deaths may in fact reflect illegal methamphetamine use.

Very limited data are available on the prescription of stimulant drugs and how those drugs are used. A review of the literature identified one research article on this subject. A 2015 University of Florida [study](#) analyzed data from the National Monitoring of Adolescent Prescription Stimulants survey of 11,000 youth (ages 10 to 18) in ten U.S. cities, including Tampa. The analysis found that 88 percent of youth who used stimulant drugs non-medically in the past 30 days said they had obtained the medications from someone else. About 7% of the youth surveyed said they had used a prescription stimulus in the past 30 days. Fifty-four percent (54%) reported nonmedical use such as smoking the medication or using someone else's prescription. Thirty-nine percent (39%) reported taking more medication than was prescribed.

Nationally, the number of ADD/ADHD stimulant prescriptions dispensed annually increased 39% between 2007 (34.8 million) and 2011 (48.4million) ([DEA, 2012](#)). A [2008 study](#) (McDonald and Jalbert, 2008) showed tenfold differences in such prescriptions among the states. Florida's rate of 3% for children was somewhat higher than the national rate of 2.5%, but Florida's rate for adults was only slightly above the national average of 0.6%. A more recent [2013 CDC study](#) looked at only eight states but again reported that Florida's rate of prescription for stimulants (200.5 prescriptions per 1,000 state residents) was midway between California (87.7 per 1,000) and Louisiana (403.9 per 1,000).

## Summary

While not definitive, data suggest that there is reason for concern about growing harm from the abuse of stimulant drugs in Florida and the nation. It will be challenging, but important, to continue tracking these stimulant drugs and maintaining awareness of the potential for introduction of new amphetamine-type substances while simultaneously combatting the ongoing opioid epidemic.

For more information about how to prevent or treat stimulant use, please visit SAMSHA at

<https://www.samhsa.gov/atod/stimulants>,

and The National Institute on Drug Abuse at

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-stimulants>



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