

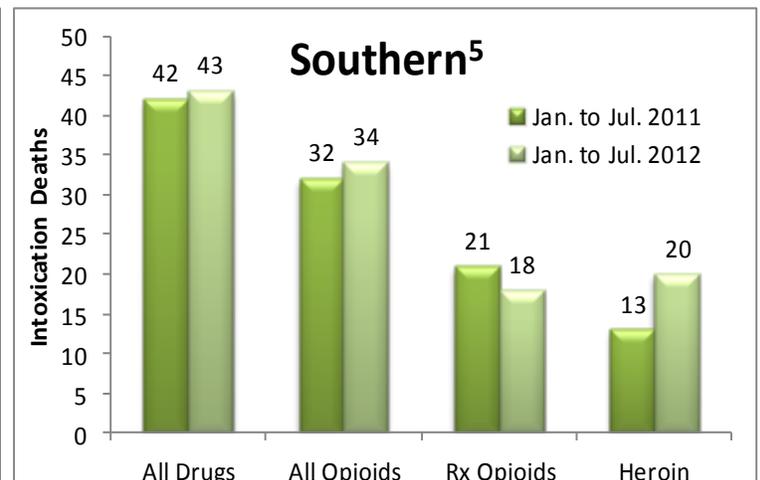
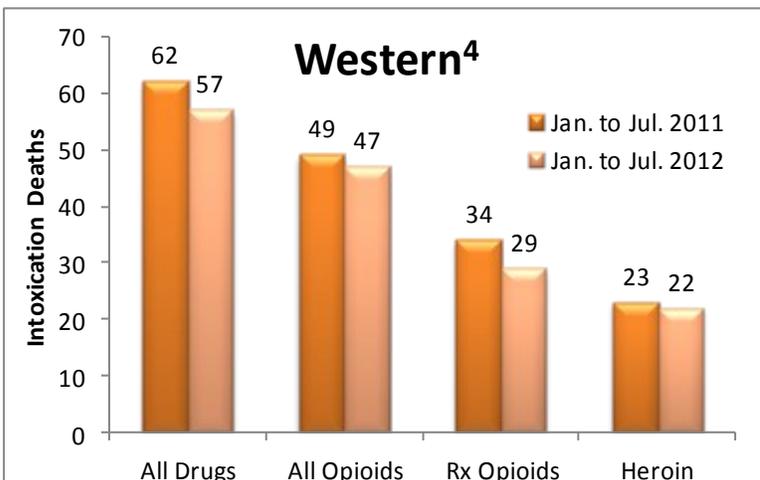
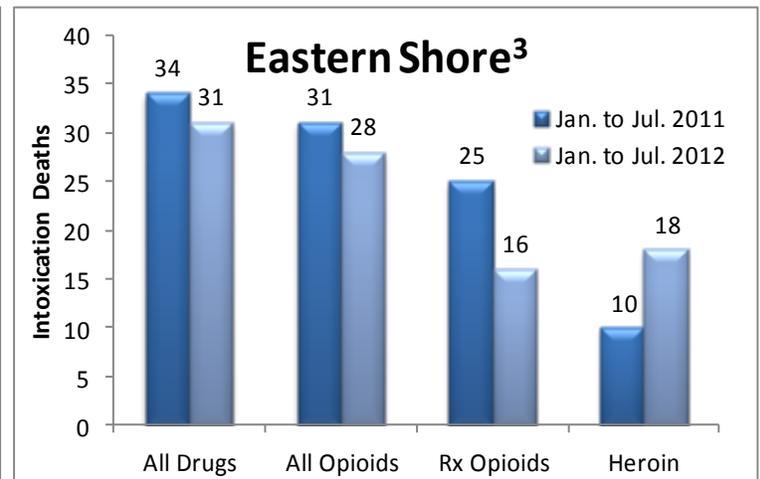
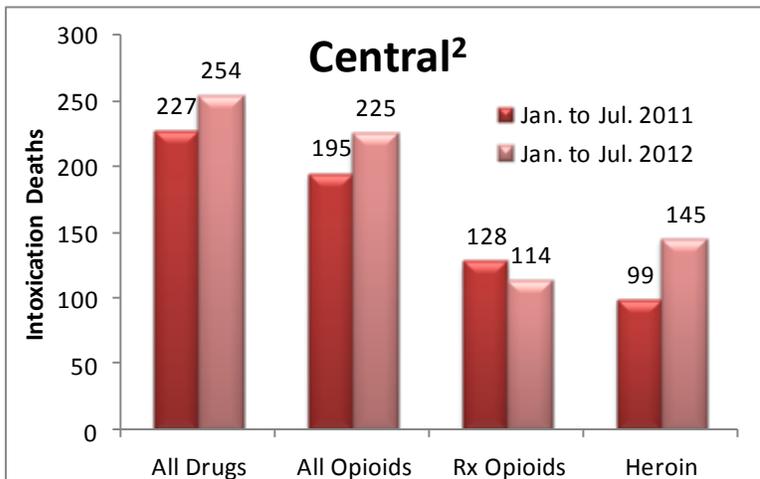
December 2012

Fatal Overdose Trend: Shift from Rx Opioids to Heroin

Following a decline between 2007 and 2011, fatal overdoses¹ related to heroin are on the rise in Maryland. In the first seven months of 2012, there were 41% more heroin-related overdose deaths than during a comparable period in 2011. By comparison, the total number of fatal drug overdoses increased by only 6%. During this period, Maryland has also experienced the first decrease in years in overdose deaths related to prescription opioids (15%).

The largest number of heroin-related deaths continue to occur in Central Maryland (including the Baltimore Metro area), which experienced a 47% increase. Southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore have also seen substantial increases of 54% and 80%, respectively. All Maryland regions had declines in prescription opioid-related deaths with the largest in the Eastern Shore (36%), followed by Western (15%), Southern (14%) and Central (11%) Maryland.

Although the largest proportion of Marylanders that die from drug overdose are of middle age, the largest increases in fatal heroin-related overdoses have been among younger age groups, including a 53% increase among ages 15-24 and a 59% increase among ages 35-44. The reduction in prescription opioid-related deaths have been driven by decreases among ages 15-24 (50%) and 45-54 (32%). Increases in heroin-related deaths have been roughly proportional for whites (42%) and African Americans (43%) as well as for men (40%) and women (46%).



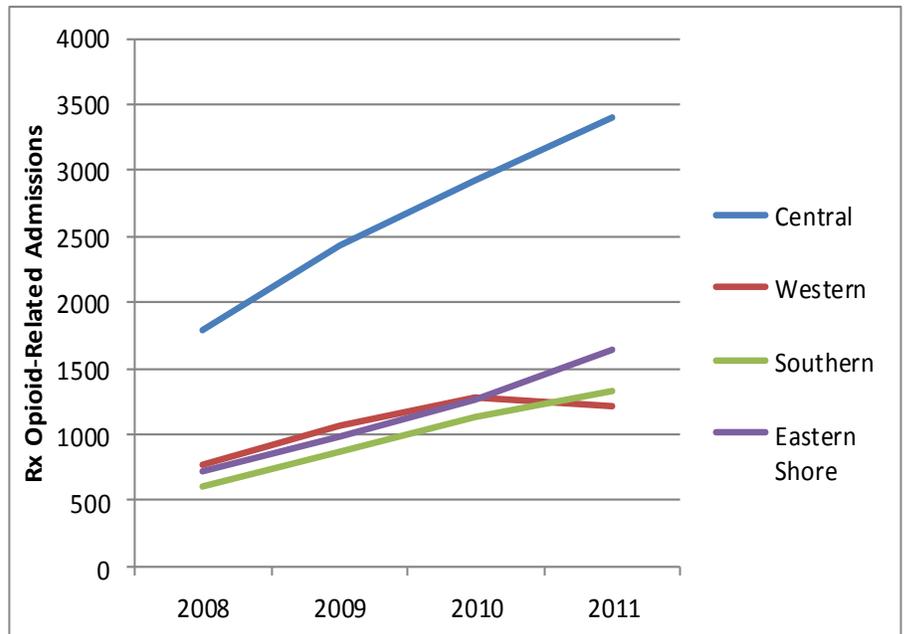
1. Data used to determine all overdose death figures comes from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. The methodology used for determining overdose death figures was developed by the Vital Statistics Administration and is available online at [www.vitalstats.org](#)
2. Includes Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Carroll County, Harford County and Howard County.
3. Includes Caroline County, Cecil County, Dorchester County, Kent County, Queen Anne's County, Somerset County, Talbot County, Wicomico County and Worcester County.
4. Includes Allegany County, Frederick County, Garrett County, Montgomery County and Washington County.
5. Includes Calvert County, Charles County, Prince George's County and St. Mary's County.

Evidence of a “Gateway Effect” from Rx Opioids to Heroin Abuse

Studies and media reports from states as diverse as Ohio⁷, Minnesota⁸, Delaware⁹, New Jersey¹⁰, New York and California¹¹ indicate that prescription opioid abuse may be serving as a gateway to heroin use. For individuals who have developed addiction through prescription opioid abuse, heroin provides a relatively cheap, potent and accessible alternative to pharmaceuticals. Local law enforcement officials have reported that the shift from prescription opioids to heroin is happening in Maryland and may be driving the increase in heroin-related overdose deaths.¹²

Action by public health and law enforcement authorities has cut down on the supply of diverted pharmaceuticals and raised awareness of the dangers of prescription drug abuse among healthcare providers and the general public. Pharmaceutical manufacturers have developed abuse-deterrent formulations for some of the most commonly abused prescription opioids. Although these efforts have demonstrated success in recent reductions in the number of prescription opioid-related overdose deaths, the reemergence of heroin presents a serious threat to public health and safety.

Figure 1: Prescription Opioid-Related Admissions to Publicly-Funded Substance Use Disorder Treatment Services in Maryland, by Region, 2008-2011⁶



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In response to emerging trends in overdose death, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is:

- Notifying Maryland healthcare providers and offering resources to improve their ability to identify patients with opioid-related substance use disorders and make referrals to the treatment and recovery system
- Encouraging the development of community-based opioid overdose prevention plans
- Implementing the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) to give healthcare providers and public health and safety authorities a new tool to reduce prescription drug abuse
- Releasing a Statewide Opioid Overdose Prevention Plan

6. Data from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration, State of Maryland Automated Record Tracking (SMART) system. SMART records patient and treatment information reported by publicly-funded, certified substance use disorder treatment providers in Maryland. Privately funded treatment providers are not required to report.
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