



Drug Overdoses, Fentanyl, and Naloxone Use Among the 2021 Adult SAM Sample

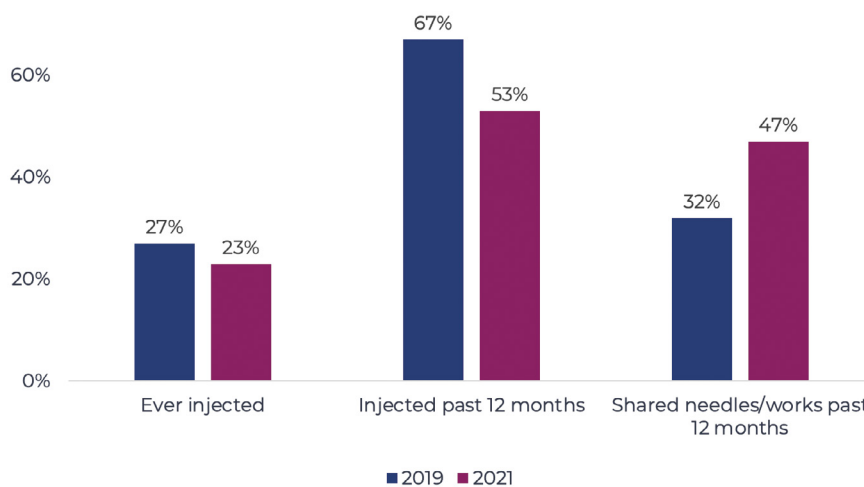
Both locally and nationally, the number of drug overdose deaths has increased dramatically in recent years, with nearly 108,000 reported in 2021, an increase of 15% from 2020. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of drug overdose deaths has increased every year since the 1970s, with the exception of 2018. In 2021, drug overdoses killed about one-quarter as many Americans as COVID-19, in addition to more than the number killed in car crashes or by firearms. Further, fentanyl (a synthetic opioid that is 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine) poisoning deaths doubled in 30 states between 2019 and 2021. Six states, including California, saw a five-fold increase in fentanyl deaths. With the recent release of the 2021 Adult Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) report, this CJ Flash takes a deeper dive on self-reported information from those interviewed regarding injection drug use, overdosing, the use of naloxone, and fentanyl.

Highlight 1

The risks of injection drug use include blood borne viruses (e.g., HIV, Hep B, Hep C), abscesses and infections, and overdoses. As Figure 1 shows, fewer individuals in 2021 reported injecting drugs (both ever and in the past 12 months), but a greater proportion reported sharing their needles and works (other items used as part of injecting such as tourniquets or alcohol swabs) in the past 12 months, compared to 2019, prior to the pandemic.

Figure 1

Self-Reported Injection Drug Use Behavior from Adult Arrestees, 2019 and 2021



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Study, 2021

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/202205.htm

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/us/politics/overdose-deaths-fentanyl-meth.html>

³ <https://www.familiesagainstoffentanyl.org/research/bystate>

⁴ As part of the SAM program, adults and juveniles arrested and booked into local facilities are asked to complete a voluntary, confidential, and anonymous interview. More information about the SAM program is available [here](https://www.sandag.org/cj).



Highlight 2

In both 2019 and 2021, around one in five of those interviewed reported they had ever overdosed on a drug (22% and 19%, respectively), but the mean number of times they had overdosed was higher in 2021 (3.2), compared to 2019 (2.3) (Table 1). In addition, the percent that said they had ever been administered naloxone (a medicine that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose) increased (from 56% to 65%), as did the percent that said they had received it more than once. The relative proportion of who had administered the naloxone also changed over time, with a greater percent reporting that law enforcement and fire/EMS administered the naloxone. A greater percentage also said that when they were administered it, they received the offer of getting into treatment, which is most likely related to the change in who was administering it.

Table 1 Self-Reported Overdose and Naloxone History of Adult Arrestees, 2019 and 2021		
	2019	2021
Ever overdosed	22%	19%
Average number of overdoses	2.3	3.2
Ever administered naloxone	56%	65%
Received naloxone once	52%	39%
Received naloxone twice	17%	31%
Received naloxone three or more times	31%	31%
Who administered naloxone		
Family	21%	18%
Friend	54%	38%
Law enforcement	8%	21%
Fire/EMS	25%	62%
Service provider	8%	9%
Health care provider	17%	18%
Person who administered naloxone offered treatment	33%	57%

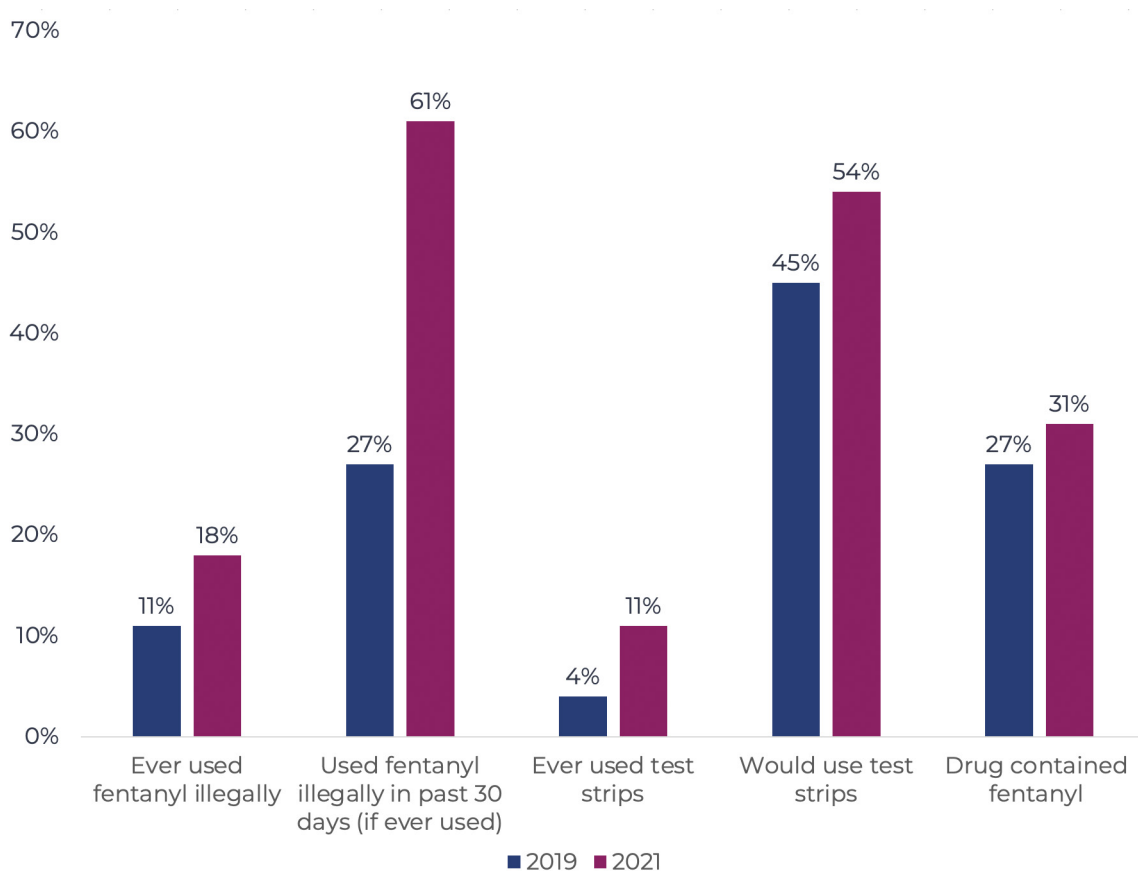
SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Study, 2021



Highlight 3

According to the survey responses of adult arrestees, there is a growing awareness of what fentanyl is, as well as growing use by those interviewed. As Figure 2 shows, a greater percentage of those interviewed reported ever and recently using fentanyl illegally in 2021, compared to 2019, when slightly more thought they had used a drug that contained fentanyl in it. A greater proportion had used test strips to see if a drug contained fentanyl, and more said that they would be willing to use the strips if they had them. In addition, compared to when the question was first asked, none of those interviewed in 2021 said they did not know what fentanyl was, compared to 23% in 2018, the first year this question was asked (not shown).

Figure 2
Self-Reported History Related to Fentanyl of Adult Arrestees, 2019 and 2021



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Study, 2021