

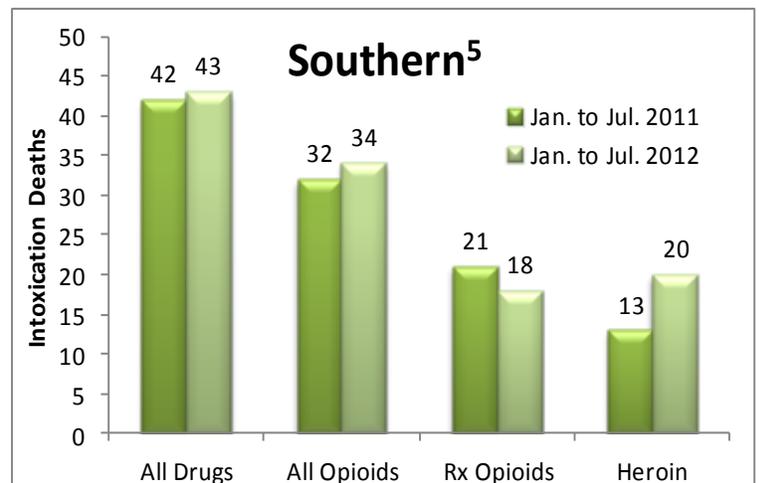
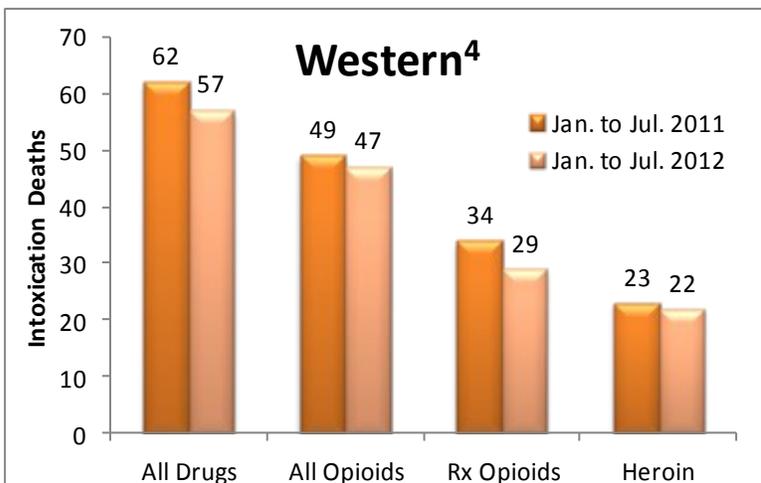
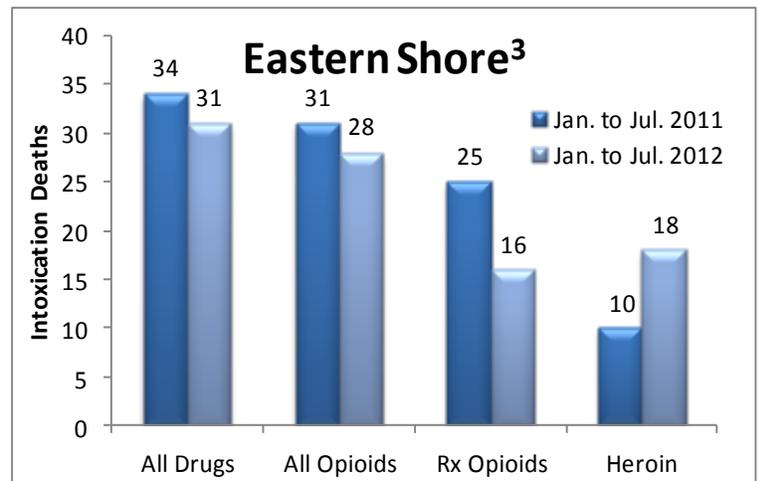
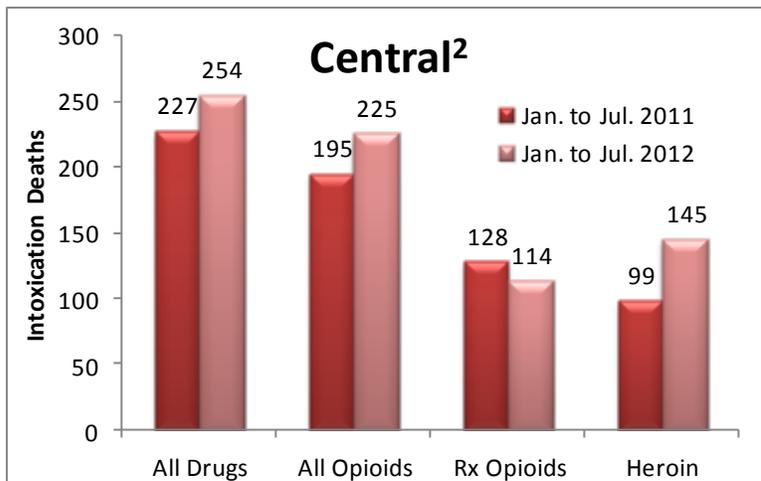
December 2012

Heroin Overdose Deaths on the Rise, Rx Opioid Overdose Deaths Down

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has identified a shift from prescription opioids to heroin among drug overdose deaths¹ in Maryland. During the first seven months of 2012, there were 41% more drug overdose deaths related to heroin than during the same period in 2011. This increase coincides with a 15% reduction in the number of prescription opioid-related overdose deaths. Overall, the number of drug overdose deaths has increased 6%, from 365 deaths to 385 deaths.

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: <http://dhmh.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Methods--drug-report.pdf>.

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.

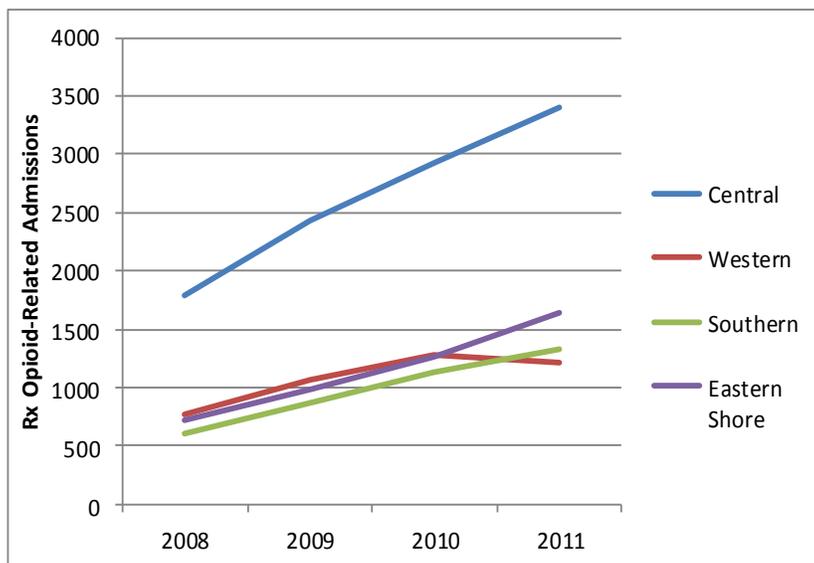
5. Includes Calvert County, Charles County, Prince George's County and St. Mary's County.

A Potential Connection Between Abuse of Rx Opioids and Heroin Use

Like many other states, Maryland has experienced rising rates of prescription drug abuse in recent years. Admissions to substance abuse treatment programs related to prescription opioids like oxycodone, hydrocodone and methadone have risen steadily since 2008 (see Figure). Studies and media reports from states as diverse as Ohio⁷, Minnesota⁸, Delaware⁹, New Jersey¹⁰, New York and California¹¹ suggest that individuals who abuse prescription opioids increasingly may be initiating 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 this may be a factor in 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 among healthcare providers and the general public of the dangers of prescription drug abuse. 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 recent increase in heroin-related deaths presents a serious threat to public health and safety.

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



Maryland's public health response to this challenge will include:

- **Outreach to physicians and other health care providers to help them identify potential heroin users and refer them to effective treatment**
- **Support for innovative local efforts to respond to drug overdose across the state**
- **Development of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) to provide support for referral to treatment**

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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