



The illicit drug use in Estonia (2017)

The high level of illicit drug use among students and youth

Estonia stands out in the European Union for its higher than average prevalence of drug use among 15- to 16-year-old students (ESPAD 2015). In 1995, 7% of 15- to 16-year-old students had tried illegal drugs, in 2007, this number had increased to 32%, and to 38% by 2015 (figure 1). Drugs are tried most frequently by 14- and 15-year olds and usually are confined to one or two attempts. The most popular substances among students are cannabis, inhalants, sedatives and sedatives and tranquilizers (without a doctor's prescription). In 2015, 3% of students used Ecstasy and 2% used amphetamines (Vorobjov 2016).



Figure 1. The lifetime prevalence of illicit drug use by 15- to 16-year-olds (%) 1995–2015 (ESPAD).

In addition to the ESPAD study, information about the illicit drug use of Estonian young people is provided by Estonian youth study conducted by NIHD that included a broader age group (14- to 29-year-olds). When comparing 2015 to 2010, we see that drug use has increased in all age groups. A total of 26% 14- to 15-year olds (18% in 2010), 47% of 16- to 18-year-olds (28% in 2010), 57% of 19- to 24-year-olds (39% in 2010) and 59% of 25- to 29-year-olds (47% in 2010) had used drugs during their lifetimes. During the previous four weeks, 12% of 14- to 18-year-olds and 10% of 19-29-year olds had used cannabis. Of vocational school students (16- to 18-year-olds), 22% had used cannabis during the previous four weeks, of whom 8% did so once a week or more frequently. Among 14- to 18-year-olds and 19-29-year-olds, almost 5% used cannabis once a week or more frequently (Lõhmus et al 2016).

The prevalence of drug use among adults

Based on a health behaviour study of the Estonian adult population in 2016, 22% people between the ages of 16 and 64 had use some kind of illicit drug during their lifetime: 31% of men and 15% of women. Of those who had used illicit drugs during their lifetime, 21% had done so during the last 12 months (25% of men and 17% of women), and 8% had done so during the last 30 days (11% of men and 5% of women). The largest number of people who had used illicit drugs were those aged 25 to 34 (53% of the men and 37% of the women), which was followed by the those aged 16 to 24 (48% of men and 31% of women) (Tekkel 2017).



A survey of the use of cannabis in 2014 is provided by the study of the health behaviour of the Estonian adult population (Tekkel 2015). A total of 19% 16- to 64-year-olds had used cannabis during their lifetime: 27% of the men and 14% of the women. **Table 1** provides more exact information on the frequency of cannabis use among the various age groups during different periods of time.

Table 1: The use of cannabis by gender, age group and different times periods (%)

Use of cannabis	Men		Women		Total	
	16-34	16-64	16-34	16-64	16-34	16-64
Last 30 days prevalence	7,1	2,7	0,6	0,3	3,3	1,3
Last year prevalence	19,3	7,4	5,1	1,8	11	4,1

Source: Health behaviour study of the Estonian adult population 2014, NIHD

High rate of drug related overdose deaths

Between 1999 and 2017, a total of 1,639 people died of drug overdoses in Estonia. If between 2013 and 2015, a decrease in death occurred (fig. 2), starting in 2016, the deaths caused by drug overdoses started to increase again. In 2017, there were a total of 110 deaths caused by drug overdoses. Ninety-six men and 14 women lost their lives. Through the years, the average age of people who have died due to drug overdoses has consistently increased. If in 2002, the average age of person dying of a drug overdose was 24, in 2017 it was 35.



Figure 2. Number of deaths caused by drug overdoses 2008–2017. (Source: Causes of Death Registry 2018, NIHD)



The death rate caused by drug overdoses in Estonia has been the highest in the EU for years. If in 2016, the EU average was 21.8 overdose deaths per million residents (among 15- to 64-year-olds), in Estonia it was 132 deaths (EMCDDA 2017). The high death rate in Estonia caused by overdoses is related to the use of fentanyl or fentanyl analogues, which are many hundreds to thousands of times strong than heroin. In summary, 81% of the deaths from drug overdoses are related to 3-methyl-fentanyl or fentanyl analogues (NIHD 2018) and it can be assumed that these were long-term drug users (fig. 3).

Risk behaviour of people who inject drugs

A survey of the risk behaviour of people who inject drugs and the prevalence of infectious diseases is provided by studies regularly conducted in various Estonian cities (table). Based on the studies, we can state that the average age of people who inject drugs has increased year after year and the length of time that drugs have been injected as consistently increased. Depending on the region, the main drugs that are injected are either fentanyl or amphetamine. More than half of injected drug users are HIV-positive. The rate of sharing syringes/needles that have previously been used during the last four weeks varies according to different studies, but more than half of injecting drug users have used previously used syringes/needles during their lifetime.

Table 2. Results of studies on the prevalence of HIV and risk behaviour among injected drug users, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016

	2012	2013	2014	2016
Location	Kohtla-Järve	Tallinn	Narva	Kohtla-Järve
Average age	30 years	32 years	34 years	35 years
Length of time drugs have been injected	11 years	12 years	14 years	16 years
The main injected drug during the last four weeks	Fentanyl (64%)	Fentanyl (78%)	Amphetamine (63%)	Fentanyl (65%)
Used a syringe/needle during the last four weeks	6%	23%	10%	1%
Used a syringe/needle during their lifetime	65%	67%	66%	60%
% of HIV positive (blood test)	62%	58%	48%	66%

*Different studies are listed by the study year in the section Sources.

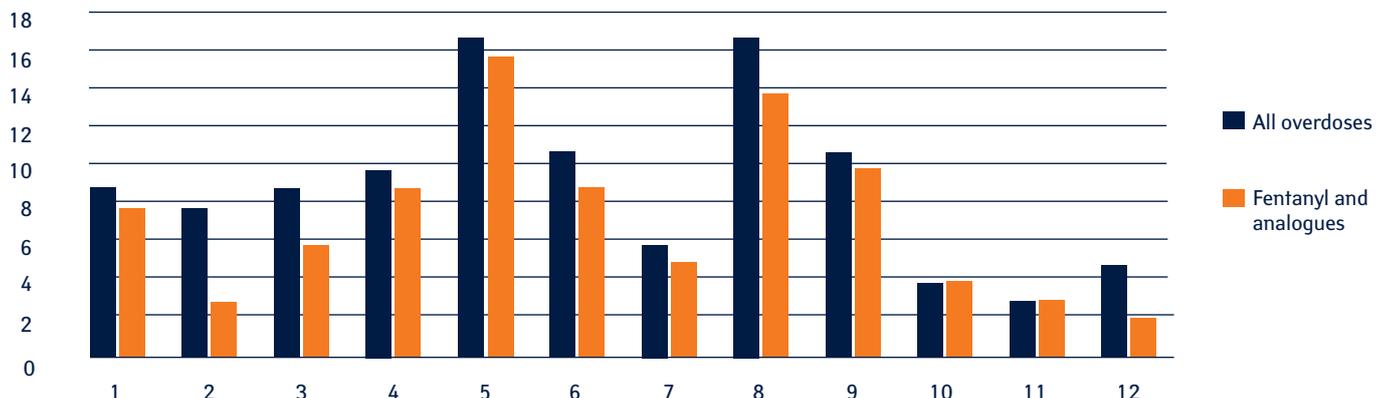


Figure 3. The substances that caused the poisoning of people who died as the result of drug overdose, by month (Source: Causes of Death Registry 2018, NIHD)

Although the prevalence of HIV among people to inject drugs has been high, it is positive that the awareness of these people regarding their HIV-positive status has increased with the years. Based on the results of the 2016 study, 66%

of people who inject drugs are HIV-positive and 64% of them are correctly informed about their HIV-positive status (fig. 4).

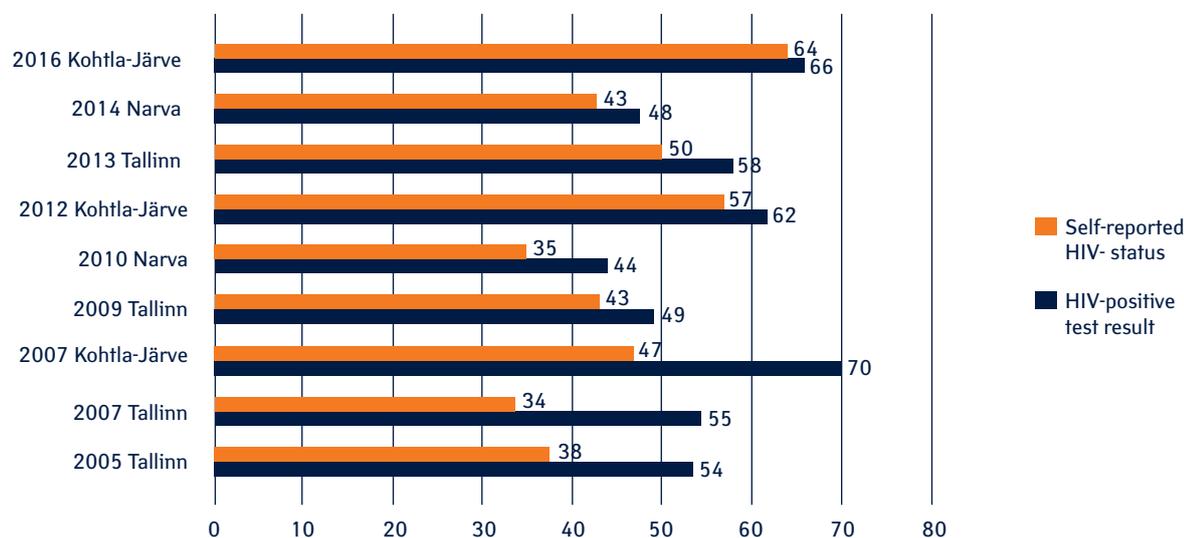


Figure 4. The awareness of people who inject drugs regarding the HIV-positive status. Results of the studies on the prevalence of HIV and risk behaviour among injecting drug users 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016



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