

HEROIN



— Heroin is an illegal, highly addictive drug. It is both the most abused and the most rapidly acting of the opiates. Heroin is processed from morphine, which comes from the seed of the poppy plant. It is typically sold as a white or brownish powder or as the black sticky substance known on the streets as "Black Tar Heroin." Although purer heroin is becoming more common, most street heroin is "cut" with other drugs or with substances such as sugar, starch, powdered milk, or quinine. Because Heroin users do not know the strength of the drug, or its true contents, they are at significant risks of overdose or death. Heroin also poses special problems because of the transmission of HIV and other diseases that can occur from sharing needles or other injectable equipment.

— According to the 1996 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, which may actually underestimate illicit heroin use, an estimated 2.4 million people use heroin at some time in their lives, and nearly 216,000 of them reported using it within the month preceding the survey. The survey estimates that they were 141,000 new heroin users in 1995, and that there has been an increasing trend toward new heroin use since 1992. A large portion of these users was smoking, snorting, or sniffing heroin, and most were under the age of 26.

— The 1996 Drug Abuse Warning network (DAWN), which collects data on drug-related hospital emergency department (ED) episodes from 21 metropolitan areas, estimates that 14% of all drug-related ED episodes involved heroin. Even more alarming is the fact that between 1988 and 1994, heroin related episodes increased by 64%.