



# Heroin-Related Emergency Department Visits on the Rise in Maryland

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## Background

Heroin is an illicit opioid analgesic that quickly converts to morphine when it enters the body. Heroin can be administered as an injection or smoked/inhaled as a powder. The purity of heroin varies greatly since it is cut with an additive agent such as caffeine, sugar, powdered milk, chemicals, or other drugs.

## Current Update

There has been a dramatic increase in heroin-related emergency department visits in Maryland in recent years. All but a small number of these visits were the result of heroin overdoses. Between 2008 and 2013, the number of heroin-related emergency department visits for Marylanders has more than tripled, with 1,200 emergency department visits occurring in 2013.

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## Reducing Heroin-Related Overdoses

There are four major efforts to reduce heroin-related overdoses throughout the State:

- ⇒ **Coordination Among State Agencies.** On June 27, 2014, Governor O'Malley signed an Executive Order establishing the Overdose Prevention Council. The Council is bringing together a coalition of State agencies to reduce the number of fatal and non-fatal unintentional overdoses in Maryland. The Council will bring coordinated action to supplement the existing programs the State already uses. In addition, multiple State agencies and health information technology experts are working together to develop real-time surveillance systems to improve tracking of non-fatal heroin overdoses statewide.
- ⇒ **Expanding Access to Naloxone.** The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has implemented the Overdose Response Program to train and certify individuals to carry and administer Naloxone, a life-saving medication that can safely and effectively reverse overdoses related to heroin and pharmaceutical opioids. In addition, as of July 1, 2014, all advanced life support providers in Maryland will have received training to administer intranasal Naloxone. Finally, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention are collaborating to train and equip law enforcement officers across the State with Naloxone.
- ⇒ **Launching Public Health Awareness Campaign.** On June 27, 2014, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene began an aggressive public awareness campaign encouraging Maryland residents to "TAKE ACTION" and "Be A Hero" in the fight against opioid overdoses. As part of this effort, the Department will be delivering posters, pamphlets, and emergency cards to each local health department for distribution throughout their jurisdictions. Campaign materials will also be shared with first responders, local jails, detention centers, hospital emergency rooms, grocery stores, and other locations throughout Maryland.
- ⇒ **Fighting the Drug Trade.** The Maryland State Police are fighting the drug trade and helping Marylanders get treatment. The State Police Criminal Enforcement Division continues to focus on combating statewide heroin distribution. Initiatives are already underway to address inter-jurisdictional and cross border distribution, while Maryland State Police troopers will receive Department of Health and Mental Hygiene printed materials for drug treatment/overdose protection to distribute.

Number of Heroin-Related Emergency Department Visits in Maryland, 2008-2013.

