

Top Drug Threats to the United States



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The DEA recently released the 2016 National Drug Threat Assessment (NDTA) Summary (<https://www.dea.gov/resource-center/2016%20NDTA%20Summary.pdf>). This report discusses multiple threats including the Transnational Criminal Organizations that supply illicit substances to distributors and users in the United States, most significant substances posing threats, and the threat of illicit finance. All information about dangerous substances shared in this brief can be found in the report.

Using multiple data sources, the DEA determined that the most significant drug threats to the United States are:

Controlled Prescription Drugs (CPDs)

- Includes prescription medications scheduled under the Controlled Substances Act based on medical use, abuse potential, and likelihood of dependence
- Second largest number of users after marijuana - 6.54 million in 2014
- Number of poisoning deaths is greater than deaths for cocaine and heroin combined - 25,760 in 2014
- Top 5 CPDs* distributed in 2014 were opioid painkillers and stimulants

Heroin

- 435,000 users in 2014 and numbers are growing
- Poisoning deaths are increasing - 10, 574 in 2014
- Overdose deaths are particularly high in Northeast and Midwest

Fentanyl

- Users may not know they used if mixed with heroin or made into fake prescription pills
- A strong synthetic opioid – as little as 2 milligrams can be lethal
- 5,544 deaths involving synthetic opioids (fentanyl and tramadol) in 2014

Drug poisoning is the leading cause of injury death in the United States and poisoning deaths are currently at their highest level. Given their prevalence and overdose levels, CPDs, heroin, and fentanyl are the substances ranked as the most significant drug threats. However, methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, and new psychoactive substances also present significant threats to the United States that are discussed in the report.

* Top 5 Schedule II and III CPDs distributed nationwide in 2014: hydrocodone (opioid), oxycodone (opioid), amphetamine (stimulant), methylphenidate (stimulant), morphine (opioid)