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The Changing Landscape of Drug Trends in New Jersey & How they Impact the Workplace

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Business leaders in New Jersey cannot afford to treat substance use as a distant public health issue - it directly impacts their workforce, productivity, safety, and long-term organizational stability. The drug landscape is constantly evolving. Substances like fentanyl and xylazine are increasingly found in the illicit drug supply, often without a user's knowledge. These substances are far more potent and unpredictable than traditional opioids, dramatically increasing the risk of overdose. Employees or their family members may unknowingly be exposed, leading to sudden medical emergencies, absenteeism, or even loss of life. Staying informed allows leaders to respond proactively rather than reactively.

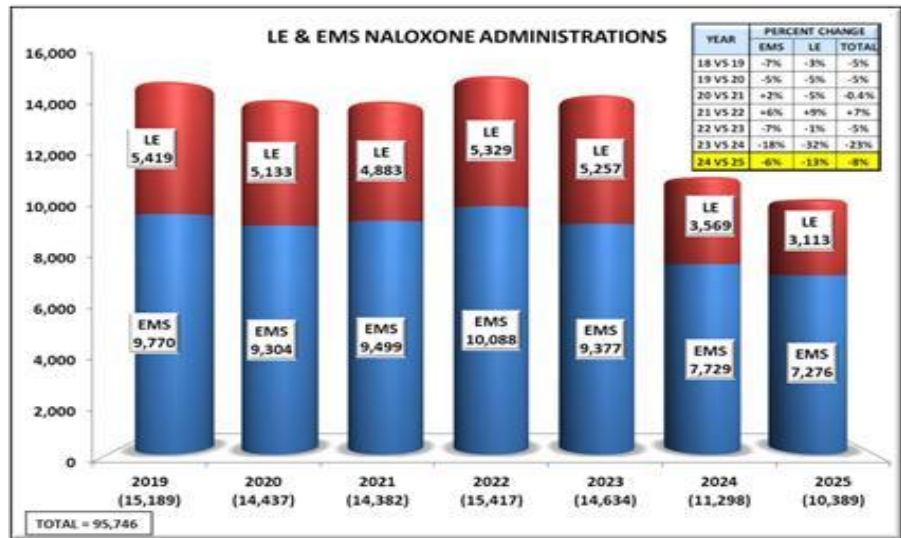
Substance use disorder(s) (SUD) not only affects the individual using drugs; it ripples through families and workplaces. An employee struggling personally or supporting a loved one with addiction may experience stress, distraction, or burnout. This can result in decreased productivity, increased errors, higher healthcare costs, and safety risks - especially in industries involving machinery, driving, or public interaction.

There is a strong business case for preparedness and prevention. Educated leaders can implement modernized drug-free workplace policies that reflect current realities, including prescription medication misuse and evolving illicit drug trends. They can also promote a culture of support rather than stigma, encouraging employees to seek help early. This reduces turnover, improves morale, and strengthens organizational resilience. Workplace leaders who stay informed can partner with community organizations, support employee assistance programs, and align with state initiatives to combat substance use.

Overdose prevention has become a workplace safety priority. Having naloxone readily available and training staff to administer it can save lives. In short, being informed is more than awareness. It's about leadership that protects and supports your staff, maintains a safe and productive workplace environment, and playing a meaningful role in addressing a crisis that affects both your employees and their families.

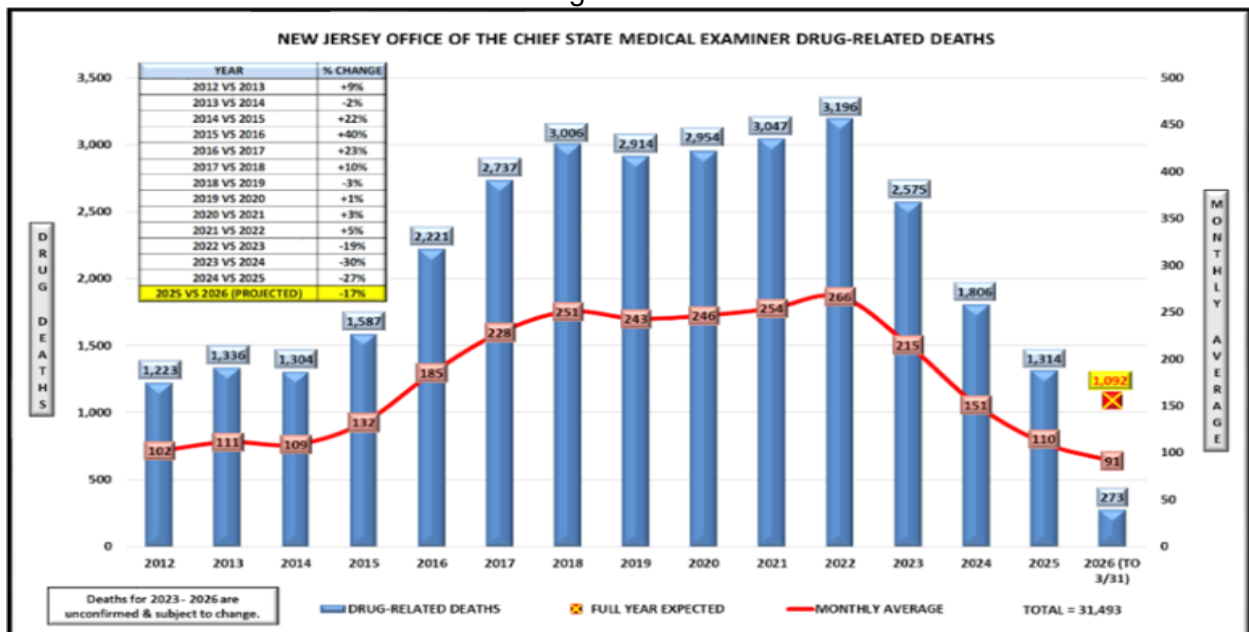
Statewide Naloxone Administrations

Naloxone administrations by both emergency medical services (EMS) and law enforcement (LE) have been declining since 2023, reaching a combined total of 10,389 administrations statewide in 2025. This data does not account for any administrations by civilians; data is collected when reported by law enforcement or EMS. The chart depicts the number of administrations statewide.



Statewide Suspected Drug Related Deaths

According to the New Jersey Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner, drug-related deaths have decreased by 57 percent since 2023 and are projected to decrease by an additional 17 percent in 2026. Over the last three years, the importance of naloxone saturation and availability to civilians cannot be overstated - it is saving lives.

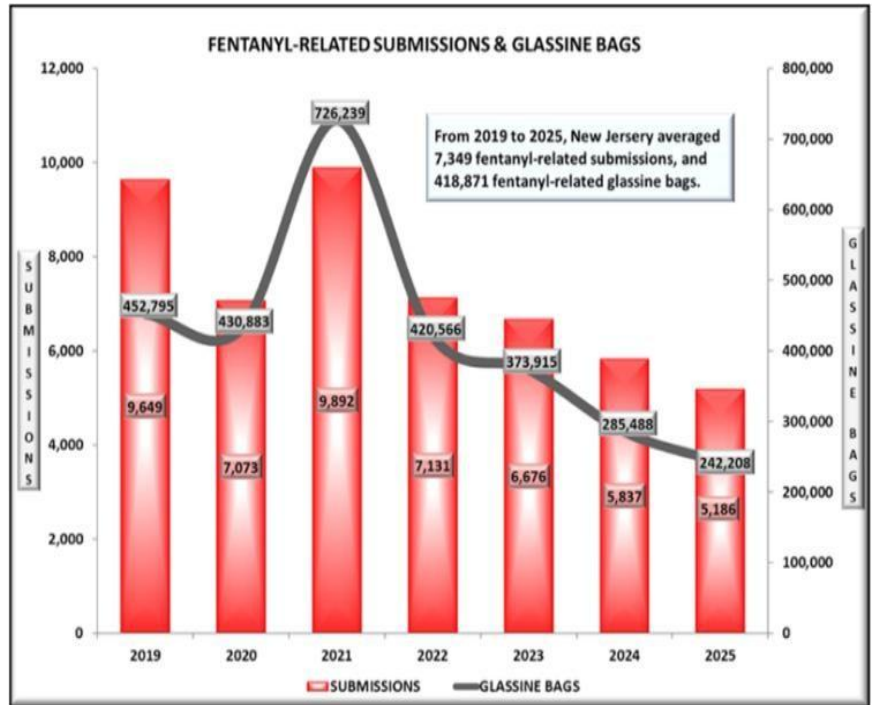


Drug Landscape

The opioid epidemic in New Jersey continues to affect individuals. Staying educated is the first step in creating policy to support employees and their families in the workplace. Below are a few of the prevalent drugs currently surfacing in New Jersey's drug landscape.

Fentanyl

"Fentanyl- related" includes any cases submitted to forensic labs testing positive for any fentanyl class compounds or fentanyl analogs, alone or in combination with any other drug. The chart to the right shows the presence of fentanyl in suspected heroin submissions year over year.



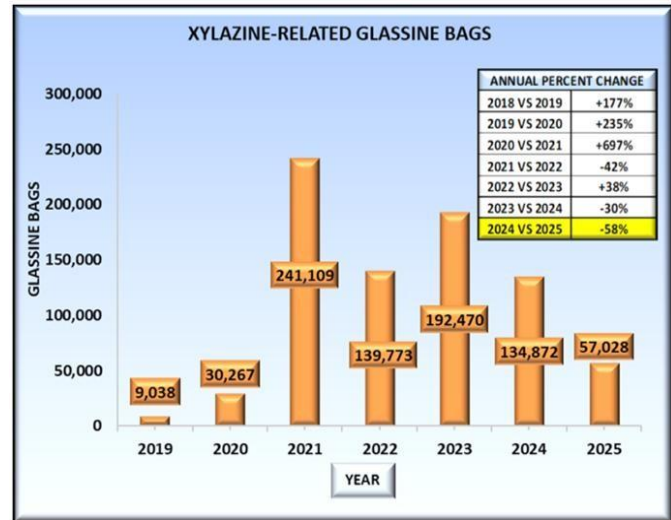
Heroin

Submissions of suspected heroin decreased by 11% between the 2024 and 2025, total glassine bags decreased by 7% as depicted in the graph to the left.

Heroin is heavily adulterated by other drugs, as only 1% of submissions and 4% of bags tested positive for heroin only.

Xylazine

Xylazine is a non-opioid sedative, muscle relaxant and analgesic that is FDA-approved for veterinary use only. It is not a DEA-scheduled drug. The drug was first analyzed in the state in 2015. Between 2024 and 2025, there was a 58% decrease in xylazine-related glassine bags. However, Most suspected heroin submissions and glassine bags containing xylazine also include fentanyl or fentanyl analogs.



Importance of Naloxone Availability in the Workplace

Understanding overdose response - and making naloxone readily available in workplaces has become a critical safety measure, not just a healthcare issue. In a state like New Jersey, where opioids (including fentanyl) are widespread, having naloxone on-site can mean the difference between life and death. Providing naloxone in the workplace protects employees, customers, and visitors; demonstrates a commitment to health and safety; reduces liability through preparedness and duty of care; and aligns with modern workplace safety practices. Recognizing the signs is essential for immediate action:

Signs & Symptoms of an Opioid Overdose

- Slow, shallow, or no breathing
- Unresponsiveness or inability to wake
- Blue or gray lips and fingernails
- Pinpoint pupils
- Gurgling or choking sounds

Naloxone is a safe, fast-acting medication that reverses opioid overdoses. It has no effect if opioids are not present, it is non-addictive, and safe to administer. A specific situation may require multiple doses, especially with potent drugs like fentanyl.

When responding to an overdose, call 911 immediately, administer naloxone, provide rescue breathing if needed, stay with the person until help arrives, and administer a second dose if the person does not respond after 2 – 3 minutes. In New Jersey, naloxone is widely accessible without an individual prescription. Good Samaritan laws generally protect individuals who administer naloxone in good faith during an emergency.

Best Practices for Employers

- Keep naloxone kits in visible, accessible locations (like AEDs)
- Train staff on overdose recognition and response
- Include naloxone in emergency action plans
- Partner with local health departments or community organizations for training and supply
- Update drug-free workplace policies to include education, prevention, and support.

Overdose response is not about enabling substance use, it's about saving a life. A person saved by naloxone has another chance to seek treatment, reconnect with family, and live a healthy life. For business leaders, it reflects proactive leadership, compassion, and a strong commitment to workplace safety.

Training, Education & Resources

Education is one of the many paths needed to combat the opioid epidemic in New Jersey. Employers can include training on naloxone, how to use naloxone, and provide naloxone to employees. It is vital to understand that naloxone is for everyone. The more people who carry naloxone, the more lives that can be saved when time is of the essence.

In addition to training on naloxone use and availability, train employees on the signs of substance use disorder (SUD) as well as available resources. It is important that employers and employees understand not just the signs of SUD, but what resources are available in their area for those who need assistance. Regular training, updates, or newsletters may be helpful, reminding employees of the signs of SUD, local resources, and how to administer naloxone.

Operation RISE facilitates training and can be scheduled by emailing NJRISE@dmi.gov.

DMAU/DMI: Description & Information

The New Jersey Regional Operations & Intelligence Center (NJ ROIC) monitors drug activity in New Jersey through the Drug Monitoring & Analysis Unit (DMAU), to provide situational awareness of the state's drug environment. DMAU establishes multi-jurisdictional drug incident information-sharing collaboration through the collection and analysis of drug seizures, overdoses and healthcare-related services. The DMAU intelligence capability enables law enforcement agencies and public health experts to better understand trends, patterns, anomalies, implications, and threats from illicit drug activity that have an impact on jurisdictions statewide. This understanding enables the development of enhanced policies and practices to prevent drug use and misuse and to mitigate community drug harm.

About the Authors and The NJ State Police Operation RISE

DSFC Brian Krusel, oversees operations at DMAU. DMAU developed Operation RISE to facilitate proactive outreach and enhance supportive outreach with state, county, and local programs. Operation RISE provides linkage to care for individuals and families impacted by SUD and has focused on naloxone saturation, distributing over 600,000 doses since 2023. This proactive initiative employs an evidence-based approach, using data analysis and the science of peer recovery professionals.

Michele Schreffler-Perez, IA, RCPF, CADCI is the director of New Jersey State Police's Operation Rise program. This proactive initiative employs an evidence-based approach, using data analysis, and the science of peer recovery professionals to drive outreach in a comprehensive and collaborative model. Operation RISE will facilitate appropriate linkage to care for substance use disorder and recovery support services to communities throughout the state, through robust data analysis, outreach/intervention, and training. For more detailed information regarding New Jersey's drug landscape or information regarding Operation RISE, please contact DMI@njsp.gov or NJRISE@njsp.gov.



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