

Article

Drug misuse in England and Wales: year ending June 2022

An overview of the extent and trends of illicit drug use. Data are from the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

Contact:
Pete Jones
crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)20 7592 8695

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1 . Main points

- Approximately 1 in 11 adults aged 16 to 59 years (9.2%; approximately 3 million adults) and approximately 1 in 5 adults aged 16 to 24 years (18.6%; approximately 1.1 million adults) reported last year drug use in the year ending June 2022; there was no change compared with the year ending March 2020.
- In the year ending June 2022, 2.7% of adults aged 16 to 59 years and 4.7% of adults aged 16 to 24 years reported last year Class A drug use; a significant decrease from the year ending March 2020 when this was 3.4% and 7.4%, respectively.
- There were no changes in last year drug use for the majority of individual drugs in the year ending June 2022 compared with the year ending March 2020, except for ecstasy and nitrous oxide; prevalence of ecstasy use fell from 1.4% to 0.7% in adults aged 16 to 59 years and from 4.0% to 1.1% in adults aged 16 to 24 years while prevalence of nitrous oxide use fell from 2.4% to 1.3% for adults aged 16 to 59 years and from 8.7% to 3.9% for adults aged 16 to 24 years.
- Decreases in the use of Class A drugs, ecstasy and nitrous oxide may have been a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and government restrictions on social contact.
- In the year ending June 2022, 2.6% of adults aged 16 to 59 years reported being frequent users of drugs (using them more than once a month in the past year); this was similar to the year ending March 2020 (2.1%).

About this release

Survey estimates in this release are based on the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). While this is the first comparable survey data with pre-coronavirus pandemic data from the year ending March 2020, they are not [National Statistics](#) and caution must be taken when using these data. The CSEW statistics presented in this release are based on nine months of data collection between October 2021 and June 2022, rather than the normal 12-month interview period, and on a lower response rate, which may affect the quality of the estimates.

2 . Overall trends in drug misuse

Any drug use

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed no change in the overall level of any drug use (see [Glossary](#) for definition) in the last year for the year ending June 2022 compared with the year ending March 2020.

Approximately 1 in 11 adults aged 16 to 59 years (9.2%; approximately 3 million adults) and approximately 1 in 5 adults aged 16 to 24 years (18.6%; approximately 1.1 million adults) reported last year drug use in the year ending June 2022.

The most recent (2021) survey on [Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England](#) (SDD) showed that the proportion of those aged 11 to 15 years in England who had taken any drug (excluding new psychoactive substances) in the last year was 10.4%. This was lower than previously estimated in 2018 (14.5%).

Any Class A drug use

There was a reduction in the number of adults reporting having taken any Class A drug (see [Glossary](#) for definition) in the last year compared with the year ending March 2020.

In the year ending June 2022:

- 2.7% of adults aged 16 to 59 years had taken a Class A drug in the last year (approximately 881,000); a fall of 22% compared with 3.4% in the year ending March 2020
- 4.7% of adults aged 16 to 24 years had taken a Class A drug in the last year (approximately 274,000); a fall of 37% compared with 7.4% in year ending March 2020

Class A drugs are often taken in social situations, therefore decreases in the use of Class A drugs may be the result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and government restrictions on social contact. Evidence from the [Global Drug Survey: COVID-19 special edition](#) showed around 40% of respondents reported using ecstasy and cocaine less often than before the coronavirus pandemic. At least 80% reported the reason for doing so was that they have less occasions where they would use these drugs.

Figure 1: Class A drug use in the last year has decreased

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 24 years reporting use of any drug, any Class A drug and cannabis in the last year, England and Wales, year ending December 1995 to year ending June 2022

Notes:

1. Data for 1995, 1997 and 1999 are for the year ending December, data for 2022 are for the year ending June, all other years included are year ending March.
2. See [Glossary](#) for definitions of Any drug and Any Class A drug.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

Trends in use of individual drug types for the year ending June 2022

- **Cannabis:** Since estimates began in the year ending December 1995, cannabis has consistently been the most used drug in England and Wales; in the latest year, 7.4% and 16.2% of adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 24 years, respectively, reported having used the drug in the last year; a similar level to the year ending March 2020 and the year ending March 2012; however, levels are much lower compared with the year ending December 1995.
- **Powder cocaine:** There was no change in the prevalence of last year powder cocaine use for adults aged 16 to 59 years (2.0%) and 16 to 24 years (4.0%) compared with the year ending March 2020. However, levels were higher than the year ending December 1995 when estimates were first recorded.
- **Ecstasy:** Prevalence of last year ecstasy use was at its lowest level since data were first collected; 0.7% of adults aged 16 to 59 years and 1.1% of adults aged 16 to 24 years had reporting taking this drug in the last year; a 47% decrease for those aged 16 to 59 years and a 72% decrease for those aged 16 to 24 years compared with the year ending March 2020.
- **New psychoactive substances (NPS):** The level of NPS use in the last year among adults aged 16 to 59 years (0.4%) and 16 to 24 years (0.9%) showed no change compared with the year ending March 2020.
- **Nitrous oxide:** In the last year 1.3% of adults aged 16 to 59 years and 3.9% of adults aged 16 to 24 years had used nitrous oxide, this is equivalent to around 444,000 and 230,000 individuals, respectively; around half as many as reported use in the year ending March 2020.

Figure 2: Ecstasy and nitrous oxide use in the last year have decreased

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 24 years reporting use of drugs in the last year, England and Wales, year ending December 1995 to year ending June 2022

Notes:

1. Data for 1995, 1997 and 1999 are for the year ending December, data for 2022 are for year ending June, all other years included are year ending March.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

For the latest estimates of lifetime drug use and drug use in the last month see Section 1 of the [accompanying dataset](#).

3 . Frequency of drug use in the last year

In the year ending June 2022, 2.6% of adults aged 16 to 59 years were frequent drug users (approximately 862,000). A frequent user is defined as having taken any drug more than once a month in the last year. This was similar to the year ending March 2020 (2.1%). Around 274,000 young adults aged 16 to 24 years were frequent users of drugs in the year ending June 2022 (4.7%).

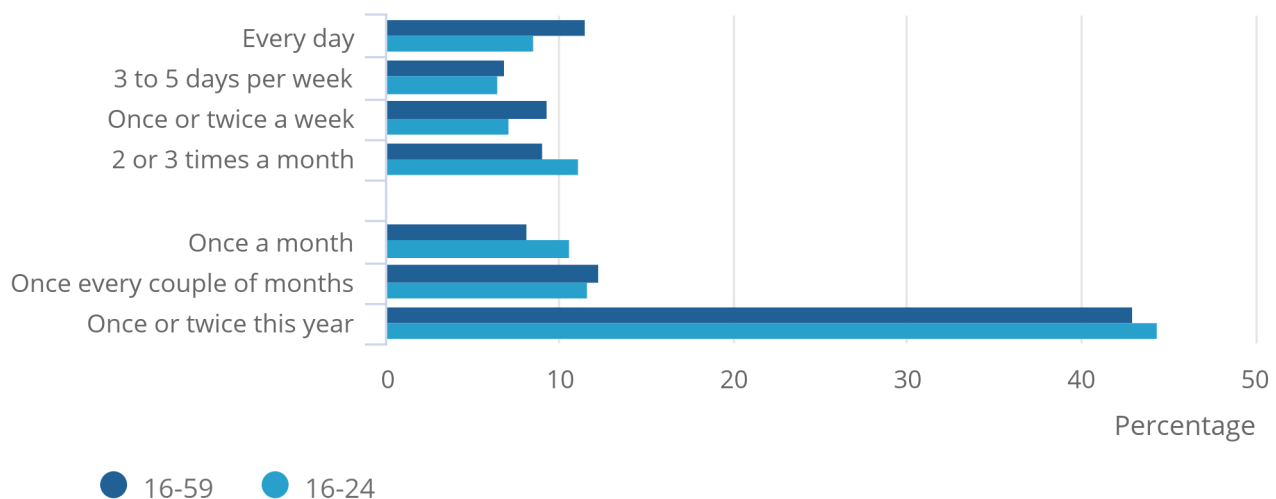
The majority of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using any drug in the last year were infrequent users (63.4%), with 43% reporting they had only taken them "once or twice" (Figure 3). This was similar for adults aged 16 to 24 years.

Figure 3: The majority of adults who had taken drugs in the last year used them infrequently

Frequency of use (%) in adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 24 years who had taken any drug in the last year, England and Wales, year ending June 2022

Figure 3: The majority of adults who had taken drugs in the last year used them infrequently

Frequency of use (%) in adults aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 24 years who had taken any drug in the last year, England and Wales, year ending June 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Notes:

1. See [Glossary](#) for definition of Any drug.

Over one-third of adults (38.7%) aged 16 to 59 years who used cannabis in the last year used the drug more than once a month, with 11.5% using it every day.

Frequency of drug use in the last year is not a measure of drug dependence. The latest information on drug dependence in England is reported in the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2014. 3.1% of adults showed signs of dependence on drugs, including 2.3% who showed signs of dependence on cannabis only and 0.8% with signs of dependence on other drugs.

For more detailed figures on frequency of drug use, see Section 2 of the [accompanying dataset](#).

4 . Drug user characteristics

Personal characteristics

For the year ending June 2022, the proportion of adults reporting any drug use in the last year was highest among those aged 20 to 24 years (23.3%).

However, notably, the prevalence of last year use decreased among those aged 16 to 19 years compared with the year ending March 2020.

- Any drug use decreased from 21.1% to 12.2%.
- Any Class A drug use decreased from 5.8% to 2.0%.
- Cannabis use decreased from 19.2% to 11.3%.

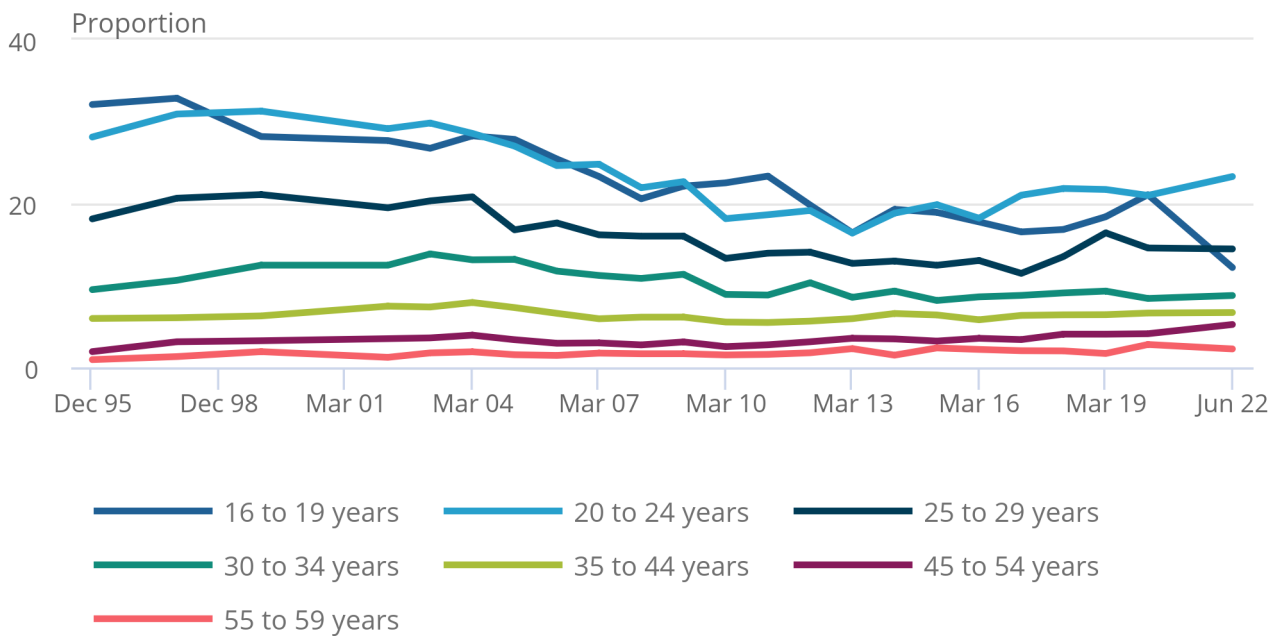
Despite these decreases, the proportion of older age groups using illicit drugs remained considerably lower than younger age groups (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Younger people were more likely to have taken a drug in the last year than older people

Proportion of adults who reported using a drug in the last year by age, England and Wales, year ending December 1995 to year ending June 2022

Figure 4: Younger people were more likely to have taken a drug in the last year than older people

Proportion of adults who reported using a drug in the last year by age, England and Wales, year ending December 1995 to year ending June 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Notes:

1. See [Glossary](#) for definition of Any drug.

Prevalence of drug use also varied by a range of other personal characteristics. For example, those who were single were significantly more likely to have used a drug in the past year (16%) compared with those who were married (3.2%).

It is important to note that personal characteristics are not necessarily independently related to drug use. For example, the relationship between drug use and marital status may be related to age.

Lifestyle characteristics

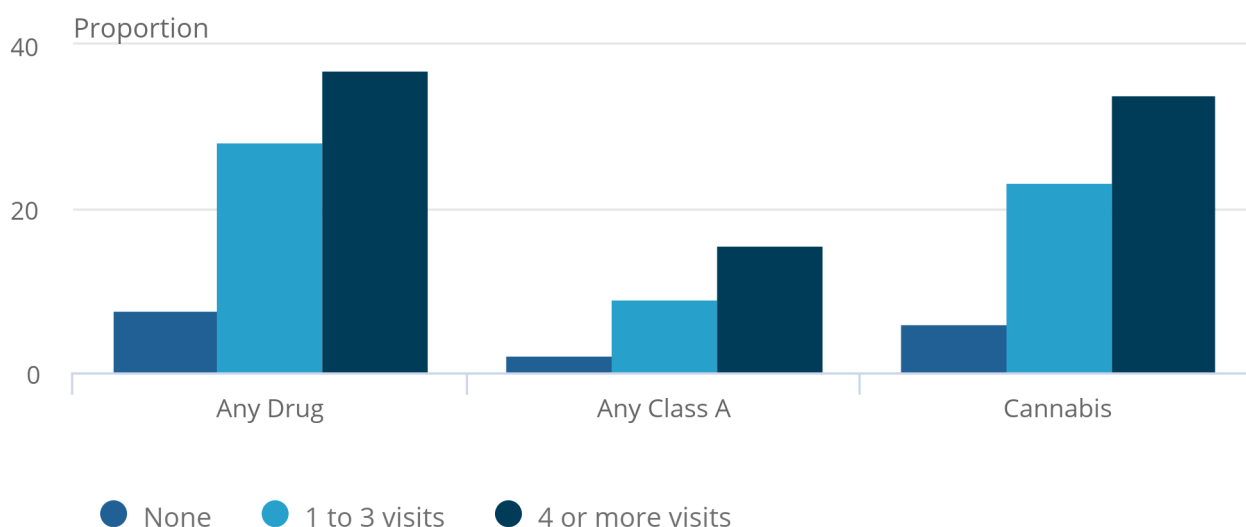
As reported previously, the more time adults spent visiting nightclubs, the more likely they were to report using a drug. For the year ending June 2022, there were significant differences between those who had taken a drug and had visited a nightclub in the last month one to three times (28.2%) or four or more times (37%), compared with those who had not visited a nightclub (7.6%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Levels of drug use were higher in those who more frequently visited nightclubs

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using a drug in the last year by frequency of nightclub visits, England and Wales, year ending June 2022

Figure 5: Levels of drug use were higher in those who more frequently visited nightclubs

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using a drug in the last year by frequency of nightclub visits, England and Wales, year ending June 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Notes:

1. See [Glossary](#) for definitions of Any drug and Any Class A drug.

A similar pattern was seen for visiting a pub in the previous month and past year drug use (See 3.06 in the [accompanying dataset](#)).

Drug use may not be independently related to lifestyle factors but instead affected by factors such as age, as younger people may be more likely to visit nightclubs or bars.

Household and area characteristics

The prevalence of drug use varies by household characteristics, such as household income (Figure 6). Those earning less than £10,400 per year were more likely to use a drug in the last year (15.2%) than those with higher incomes. These differences may not be independently related as they may be affected by factors such as age, as younger people are likely to have a lower income.

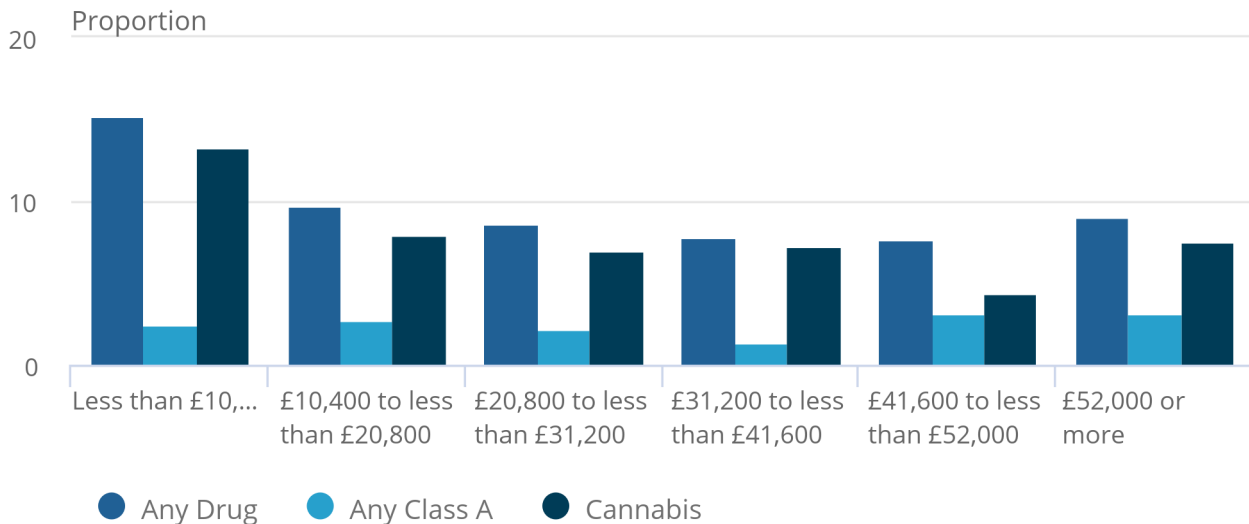
Broken down by drug type, those earning less than £10,400 per year were most likely to have used cannabis (13.2%). However, those in the highest income groups were most likely to have used a Class A drug, with 3.2% of households earning £52,000 or more per year having used a Class A drug in the last year, compared with 2.4% of households earning less than £10,400 per year.

Figure 6: Levels of drug use by household income varied by drug type

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using a drug in the last year by total household income, England and Wales, year ending June 2022

Figure 6: Levels of drug use by household income varied by drug type

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using a drug in the last year by total household income, England and Wales, year ending June 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Notes:

1. See [Glossary](#) for definitions of Any drug and Any Class A drug.

Extent of drug use and personal well-being

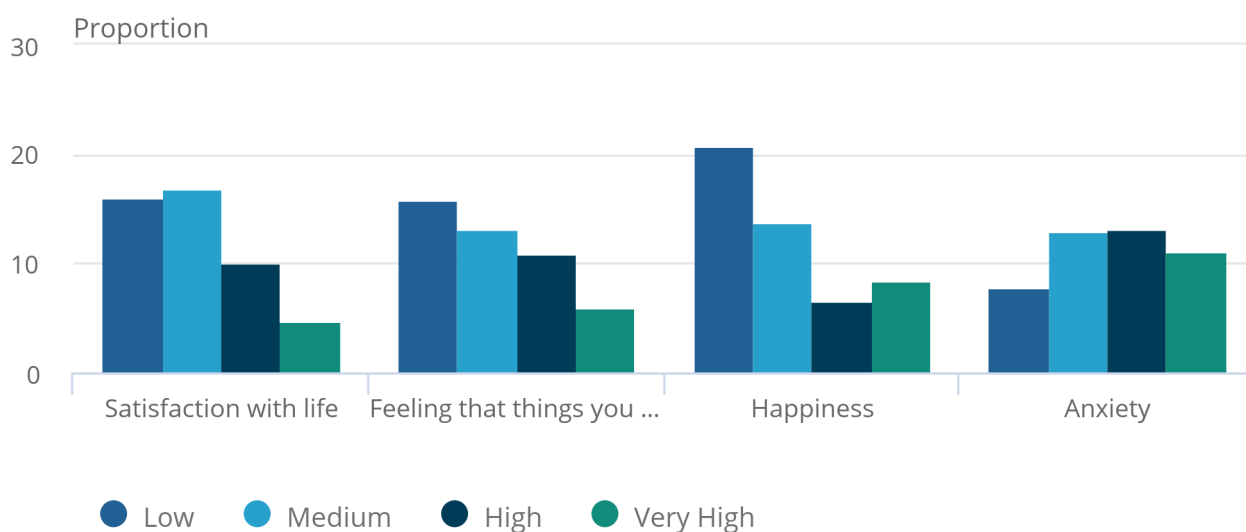
The level of drug misuse reported by adults in the last year varied across several measures of personal well-being (see [Glossary](#) for definition). Individuals who reported lower personal well-being across measures of satisfaction with life, feeling that things you do in your life are worthwhile and happiness, were more likely to have used an illicit drug in the last year (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Drug use in the last year varied by different measures of well-being

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using a drug in the last year by personal well-being, England and Wales, year ending June 2022

Figure 7: Drug use in the last year varied by different measures of well-being

Proportion of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using a drug in the last year by personal well-being, England and Wales, year ending June 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Notes:

1. See [Glossary](#) for definitions of Any drug and personal well-being.

5 . Obtaining drugs

Origin of illegal drugs

Among adults aged 16 to 59 years, almost half of all illegal drugs were obtained through a friend, neighbour or colleague (48.4%). The next most common source was a dealer, with 22.8% of adults reporting obtaining the drug this way.

Perceived ease of obtaining illegal drugs

In the year ending June 2022 around 38.8% of adults claimed it would be very or fairly easy for them to obtain illegal drugs within 24 hours, lower than was claimed in the year ending March 2020 (43.2%).

6 . Drug misuse in England and Wales data

[Drug misuse in England and Wales](#) Dataset | Released 15 December 2022 Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the extent and trends of illicit drug use.

7 . Glossary

Any Class A drug

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 classifies controlled drugs into three categories (Classes A, B and C), according to the harm that they cause, with Class A drugs considered to be the most harmful. For drugs and their classifications, please see the Home Office [List of most commonly encountered drugs currently controlled under the misuse of drugs legislation](#).

The Crime Survey for England and Wales asks questions on the use of specific drugs. Any Class A drug use is a composite variable that combines individual drugs; these include powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms, and methadone. Methamphetamine has also been included since the year ending March 2009.

Any drug

The Crime Survey for England and Wales asks questions on the use of specific drugs, any drug use is a composite variable that combines individual drugs, these include amphetamines, anabolic steroids, cannabis, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, ketamine, LSD, magic mushrooms, mephedrone, methadone, methamphetamine, and tranquillisers.

In addition to these named drugs, respondents are also asked whether they have taken something else in the same period, that is: pills or powders (not prescribed by a doctor) when the respondent did not know what they were; smoked something (excluding tobacco) when the respondent did not know what it was; and, taken anything else that the respondent knew or thought was a drug (not prescribed by a doctor). These are included in the composite measure of "any drug", but not presented individually in tables.

The definition of any drug has changed over time. For more detailed descriptions on what drugs are included in each year, see Section 1 of the [accompanying dataset](#).

New psychoactive substances

Substances such as mephedrone, spice, GBL or GHB, salvia and other emerging substances are collectively known as new psychoactive substances (NPS), often previously referred to as "legal highs". These substances are usually intended to mimic the effects of "traditional" drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy, or cocaine and can come in different forms such as herbal mixtures that are smoked, powders, crystals, tablets, or liquids.

Frequent drug user

A drug user is defined as frequent if they have taken the drug more than once a month in the last year.

Personal well-being

Four measures of personal well-being are used as part of the Crime Survey for England and Wales and follow the Office for National Statistics (ONS) standardised approach to this aspect of measurement. Further information about well-being measures can be found in our [Personal well-being in the UK: April 2021 to March 2022 bulletin](#).

8 . Measuring the data

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Drug misuse data included in this release are sourced from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). Our [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#) provides detailed information about the crime survey.

The CSEW covers the population living in households in England and Wales; it does not cover the population living in group residences (for example, care homes or student halls of residence) or other institutions, for example, prisons.

While this is the first comparable survey data with pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic data, they are not National Statistics and caution must be taken when using these data. The CSEW statistics presented in this release are based on nine months of data collection between October 2021 and June 2022, rather than the normal 12-month interview period and are based on a lower response rate, which may affect the quality of the estimates. Significance testing has been conducted to compare estimates for the year ending June 2022 with year ending March 2020, year ending March 2012 (ten-year comparison) and year ending December 1995 (earliest data available) to understand trends over time where possible. Other comparison years have been used where these data are not available.

Estimates within this publication are based on data from the CSEW self-completion module. The upper age limit for respondents eligible for the self-completion module was removed from 2019 to 2020, but remains in place for questions on drug use because of the low prevalence of drug use in those aged 60 years and over.

New psychoactive substances

Some new psychoactive substances (NPS) were previously legal to supply if they were not already controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. However, under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, all of these are now illegal to supply, produce and import.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales only measures generic, rather than specific, NPS. As a result, this estimate does not provide a measure of all drugs controlled under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016. This is because many NPS are controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and several non-NPS are controlled under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016.

9 . Strengths and limitations

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is recognised as a good measure of drug use for the drug types and population it covers. However, it does not provide as good coverage of problematic drug use, as such users may not be a part of the household resident population that is covered by the survey.

The CSEW does not cover some small groups, which is potentially important, given that they may have relatively high rates of drug use. Notably these groups include homeless people and those living in certain institutions, such as prisons. It also does not cover students living in halls of residence.

Despite the self-completion methodology of the survey, which is intended to encourage honest answers, disclosure issues still exist around willingness to report drug use. An unknown proportion of respondents may not report their behaviour honestly. However, the CSEW provides consistent measures of drug use and comparisons over time remain valid.

As a result of these possible limitations, the CSEW is likely to underestimate the level of drug misuse in England and Wales.

In addition, CSEW estimates in this release should be interpreted with caution because of the shorter nine-month data collection period and lower survey response rates. Similarly, some tables typically published as part of this release have not been produced because of quality concerns or disclosure constraints.

It should also be recognised that levels of drug use are relatively low, and the use of some drugs such as heroin are particularly rare and only have a small number of users. The range of variability for these drugs will be quite large because of sampling variability so figures will be liable to fluctuation from year to year. Changes from one year to the next should be interpreted with caution, and greater attention paid to the medium and longer-term trends.

10 . Related links

[Guide to finding crime statistics](#) Methodology | Released 21 July 2022 A guide that directs you on where best to find different crime statistics.

[User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#) Methodology | Released 4 November 2021 Quarterly statistics on crime levels and trends in England and Wales. This user guide contains detailed information on the datasets used to compile crime statistics published by Office for National Statistics (ONS).

[Drug misuse statistics](#) Bulletin | 9 December 2020 Extent and trends in illicit drug use among a sample of people aged 16 to 59 years. Previous Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) drug use publications can be found on the Home Office website.

[Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2021 registrations](#) Bulletin | 3 August 2022 Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales from 1993 to 2021, by cause of death, sex, age, and substances involved in the death.

[Substance misuse treatment for adults: statistics 2020 to 2021](#) Bulletin | 25 November 2021 Alcohol and drug misuse and treatment in adults from Public Health England's (PHE's) national drug treatment monitoring system (NDTMS).

[Young people's substance misuse treatment statistics 2020 to 2021](#) Bulletin | 27 January 2022 Alcohol and drug misuse and treatment in young people (aged under 18 years) from PHE's NDTMS.

[United Kingdom drug situation 2019: Focal Point annual report](#) Bulletin | 31 March 2021 Annual report and data tables from the UK Focal Point on Drugs on the national prevalence, impact, prevention, and treatment of drug use.

[Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England, 2021](#) Bulletin | 6 Sep 2022 Report and tables from NHS England on the smoking (including electronic cigarette use), alcohol drinking, and drugs among young people in England.

11 . Cite this article

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