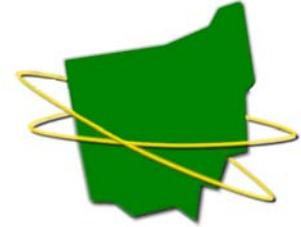




OSAM-O-GRAM

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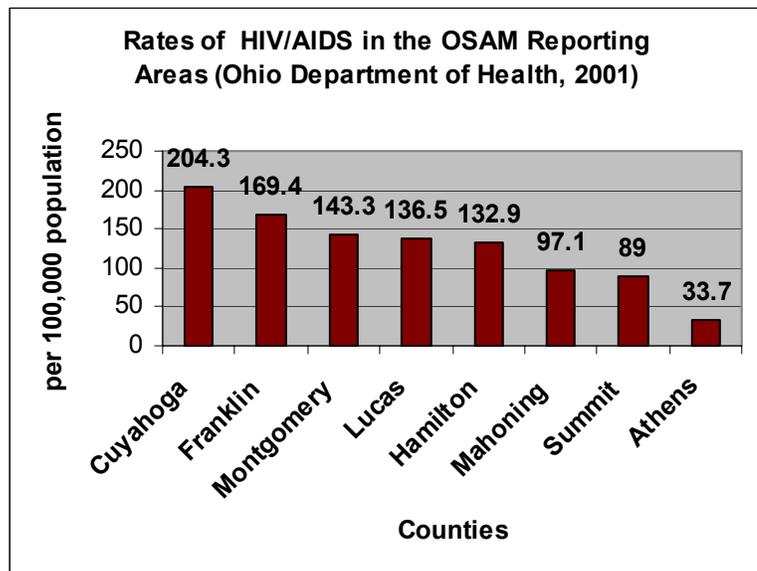


Wright State University
The University of Akron

Increases in Injection Drug Use Putting Drug Users at Risk for HIV and other Blood-Borne Diseases

Despite the fact that the rates of HIV infection are lower in Ohio compared to the major metropolitan areas on the East and West coasts, recent increases in injection drug use across the state is an important public health concern. According to the Ohio Department of Health, the rate of persons living with HIV/AIDS is about 100.3 per 100,000 population for the entire state. The highest rates are reported in the Cleveland and Columbus areas; the lowest in non-metropolitan areas (see below).

Since 2000, the OSAM Network began reporting increases in heroin availability and abuse in many areas across the state. Even though many new users may start off by snorting heroin, many of them eventually switch to injection. Increases in the abuse of prescription analgesics have also been reported across the state. Evidence collected by the OSAM Network suggests that a connection between initial abuse of prescription analgesics and subsequent transition to heroin injection is a serious and widespread trend that affects people of various backgrounds, but is increasingly common among young white individuals. Engaging in such behaviors is one of the important factors in spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases.



Despite the fact that HIV remains a serious public health concern, many injection drug users believed that HIV did not present an imminent threat to them. At the same time, many were more concerned with other blood-borne infections, especially hepatitis B and C. Furthermore, some users believed that a decrease in public concern about HIV is related to the "treatment optimism." As one active user from Akron stated:

It's [AIDS] not the death sentence that it used to be either. You used to hear, 'oh, he's got it.' A year later he's dead. Now, he lived 30-40 more years. So it's really not as scary.

In summary, the OSAM Network data suggest that increases in heroin and prescription analgesic abuse is related to escalating numbers of injection drug users across the state. However, at the time when more people put themselves at risk for HIV infection, overall concern among drug users about the spread of HIV may be decreasing.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the January 2004 OSAM Network meeting.

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