

DATE: January 2008

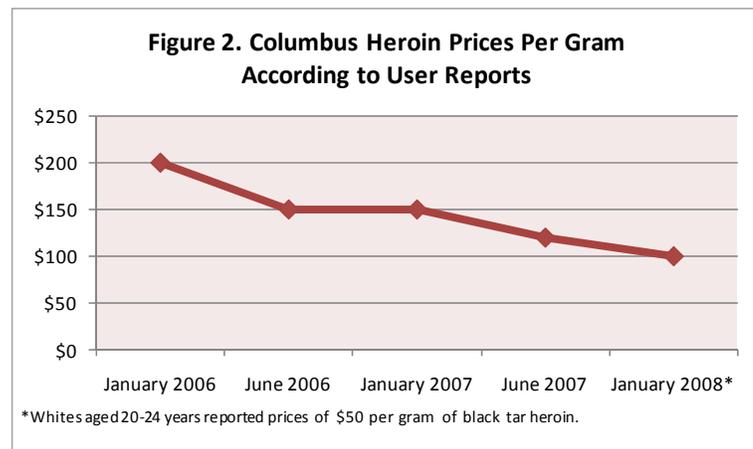
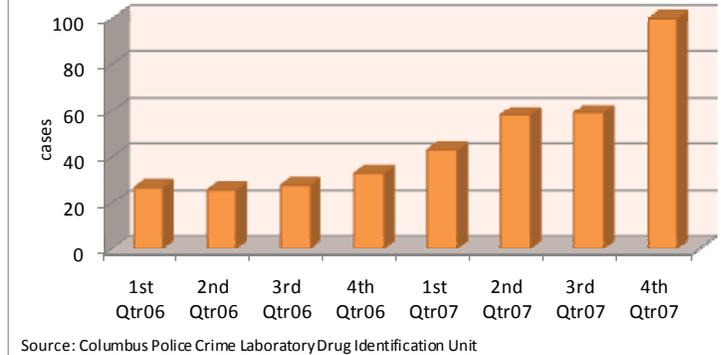
DATELINE: Ohio

Wright State University &amp; the University of Akron

### Black Tar Heroin Surge in the Columbus Metropolitan Area

Starting with the first OSAM network reports in 1999 and through 2003, heroin was generally described as "plentiful" in Columbus, and brown-powder was considered the most common form. In 2004, OSAM reports in the Columbus area suggested declining availability of powder-type heroin but documented the first cases of black tar. Between 2005 and 2007, brown powder-type heroin was gradually replaced by black tar. According to the January 2008 OSAM report, drug users, treatment providers, and law enforcement professionals reported a notable surge in the availability of heroin, with black tar now being a predominant form in the Columbus region. Some users felt that heroin has become "as available as crack," and the Columbus crime lab reported a 128% increase in heroin cases from 2006 to 2007 (Figure 1), with large quantities of black tar heroin per case. A crime lab professional commented on the shift, "We used to analyze mostly powder [heroin], now we rarely see it. It's all tar."

**Figure 1. Heroin Cases Analyzed at the Columbus Police Crime Lab per Quarter**



Coinciding with increases in availability, heroin prices have experienced a steady decline over the past two years (Figure 2). According to the January 2008 report, whites aged 20-25 years old reported buying tar heroin for as low as \$50 per gram; prices reported by other user groups were higher, averaging \$100 per gram. Brown powder-type heroin was priced at \$120 per gram. Tar heroin is commonly sold wrapped in multicolored balloons (estimated at 0.2 grams each) and grouped in "bundles." Users interviewed in the Columbus area believed that the quality of tar heroin has been high.

Availability of black tar heroin has been higher in Columbus than other areas of the state where brown powder is typically the predominant form; however, increasing levels of tar were also reported in Southeast Ohio, Cincinnati and Toledo. Unlike the brown powder heroin that is also suitable for intranasal inhalation, black tar heroin is typically administered by injection, which puts users at risk of contracting HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne viruses.

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 2008 OSAM Network meeting.

Center for Interventions, Treatment, and Addictions Research;

Robert G. Carlson, PhD, Raminta Daniulaityte, PhD, Tamara Hansen, MPH, Lawrence Hammar, PhD, Russel Falck, MA  
(937) 775-2066 (office), (937) 775-2214 (fax) <http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/>

Wright State University, Boonshoft School of Medicine, 3640 Colonel Glenn Hwy., Dayton, OH 45435-0001

For more information, visit the ODADAS website: <http://www.odadas.state.oh.us>