



# OSAM-O-GRAM

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DATELINE: Ohio



Wright State University  
The University of Akron

## OSAM Rapid Response Investigation Reveals Connection Between OxyContin Abuse and Heroin Addiction in Some Individuals

For the June 2001 to January 2002 OSAM period, a Rapid Response investigation was initiated to further document the extent of heroin abuse among young, new heroin users—an emerging trend previously identified in the OSAM areas of Akron, Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. Over the last six months, researchers from all areas of the State, except Southeast, Ohio, confirmed substantial increases in heroin abuse among young people, particularly whites.

Our investigation also revealed an alarming trend—a connection between oxycodone long-acting (OxyContin) and heroin abuse. Young, new heroin abusers seeking treatment reported OxyContin abuse prior to becoming addicted to heroin. Several individuals reported resorting to heroin when their OxyContin habits became too expensive or when the drug became difficult to obtain. Abuse of OxyContin prior to the abuse of heroin appears to be a common pattern, especially among new, young, white heroin addicts. An 18-year-old woman stated:

**Young heroin user:** *I think if, um, all my friends had never tried OxyContin, it would have never led to the heroin, never.*

**Interviewer:** *Do you know of anybody who went straight to shooting heroin?*

**Young heroin user:** *No.*

**Interviewer:** *Everybody that you know who uses heroin...*

**Young heroin user:** *...started out with OxyContin.*

Many of the young, new heroin users participating in this investigation began their abuse of heroin by snorting the drug, but turned to injecting the drug as their tolerance increased and they learned that injecting provided a less expensive, more intense high.

In general, participants believed that accessing drug treatment was fairly easy. However, the time from contacting a treatment agency to actually beginning treatment was perceived as too long (2-3 weeks in some cases). Sadly, one 18-year-old individual interviewed in Dayton, Ohio, resorted to injecting heroin for the first time while waiting to access treatment.

Results from this investigation highlight the need for State-wide prevention programs designed to educate young individuals about the dangers of prescription opioid and heroin abuse. Drug abuse treatment programs serving heroin and/or other opioid dependant individuals may soon find a rapid increase in young individuals seeking treatment.

*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 2002 OSAM Network meeting.*

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