



## Drug Abuse Trends in Rural Ohio: A Targeted Response Initiative PART III: Heroin

### Heroin Increases Among Young Whites

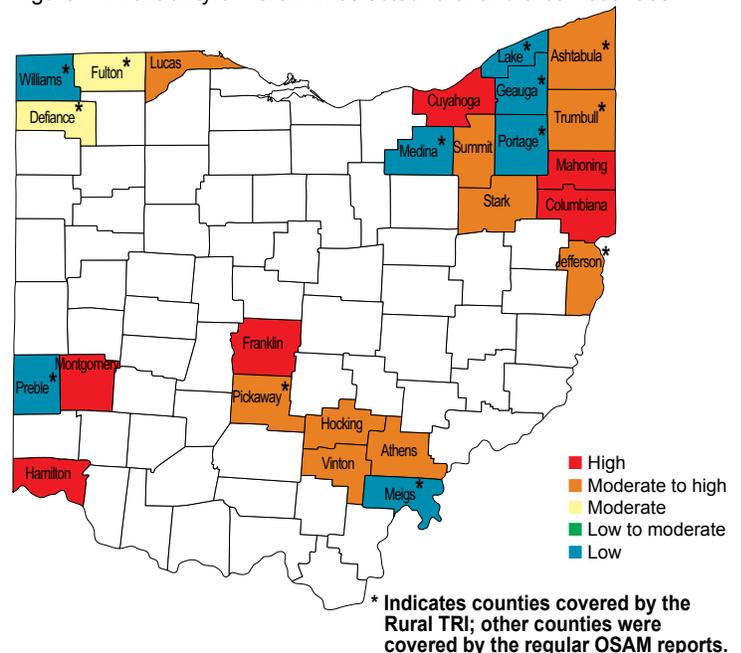
Over the past two years, the OSAM Network has documented increasing levels of heroin availability and abuse in most urban areas of the state. Results of the Rural TRI now suggest an increasing trend of heroin abuse in many rural counties as well. A user from Pickaway County explained, "It [heroin use] is bad now, but it's getting worse every day. In five years, it's going to be the worst epidemic we've ever seen. It's going to spread to every little small town." A treatment provider from Ashtabula County commented, "I think it's on the upward swing. I am seeing more and more heroin addicts coming in [for treatment]."

Consistent with urban trends, increases in heroin use in rural areas were linked primarily to young (aged 16 to 30 years old), white individuals, many of whom transitioned to heroin use following their involvement with pharmaceutical opioids. A treatment provider from Medina County commented: "What amazes me is having young girls, 18, 19, 20 years old that you would never suspect are shooting up with a needle. What I would think a stereotype heroin addict is not. A lot of young people—male and female—strung out on heroin." A user from Pickaway County also noted: "It seems to me that everyone I knew that got on heroin started out on OxyContin®. Because it got too expensive and too hard to find OxyContin® and the heroin was cheaper."

### Access to Heroin in Rural Areas

OSAM data suggest that heroin availability has been generally lower in rural than in urban areas of the state (Figure 1). Rural users typically travel to larger cities to obtain heroin. One user from Defiance County commented: "In this area the main supply is like gone. You gotta go pretty far to get it. Now you gotta drive, like I said, Dayton, Michigan, Chicago." A user from Preble County explained: "I was making 2 or 3 trips to Dayton a day, just back and forth ... I would get 2 or 3 caps of heroin, and then I would get half a gram of cocaine and half a gram of crack cocaine, and I would shoot the cocaine, and shoot the heroin, and smoke crack, and then I come back here, make some money, and go back [to Dayton]..." Another participant explained heroin distribution strategies among

Figure 1. Availability of heroin in selected rural and urban counties.



Medina County users: "Today 'Joe' is going to go up to Cleveland to pick up some heroin. So he's going to call his group of 4-5 [users], and say, 'Hey, listen, I'm going up to Cleveland today. I'm going to make a run. What do you need?'... Obviously, for the price of doing that, he'd take a bag [of heroin] off of each one of theirs or take some money for taking the risk..."

Overall, local heroin dealing was reported as relatively rare or short-lived in most rural counties covered by the OSAM Network. However, data obtained from Pickaway, Athens, Vinton and Hocking counties indicate expanding local distribution networks of primarily black tar heroin. Results of the Rural TRI suggest that although heroin is generally less available in rural areas of the state, urban and rural regions alike have seen significant increases in heroin use, especially among young whites.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Regional Epidemiologists located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual reports 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 June 2008 OSAM Network meeting.

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