

# NDEWS

## National Drug Early Warning System

### U.S. Law Enforcement Seizures of Methamphetamine Widespread and Increasing

NDEWS | National Drug Early Warning System  
Funded at the Center for Substance Abuse Research  
by the National Institute on Drug Abuse

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## Introduction

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Since the release in late 2018 of our original report, *Methamphetamine: A Regional Drug Crisis*, the NDEWS Coordinating Center has continued to monitor indicators of the availability and use of methamphetamine nationwide and in the NDEWS Sentinel Community Sites. A combination of public health and law enforcement indicators were used to assess national, regional, and polysubstance trends. This update focuses on three law enforcement sources:

The National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS-Drug)

**NFLIS-Drug** is maintained by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). NFLIS-Drug data serve as a surrogate measure of availability by identifying drugs found in law enforcement seizures in specific geographical areas. State and local crime labs report drug test results for items seized in law enforcement operations and submitted to labs for testing. Items can test positive for multiple drugs, and each positive test constitutes a report. For additional information: <https://www.nflis.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/>

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Program

**The HIDTA program** provides assistance to federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to reduce drug trafficking and production in the United States by facilitating cooperation among law enforcement agencies. Agencies share information and implement coordinated enforcement efforts that utilize available resources to reduce the supply of illegal drugs in the 29 designated HIDTA areas. For additional information: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/the-hidta-program/overview/>

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

**The CBP presents** data on drug seizures at more than 300 ports of entry in the United States monitored by U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO) and U.S. Border Patrol. Data presented reflects nationwide seizures by both OFO and U.S. Border Patrol FY2014-FY2020TDJune Data are also presented from the CBP Congressional Research Services (CRS) report for FY2012-FY2018. For additional information: <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics>

Each of these unique sources of data are important in monitoring illicit drug use, production, points of entry, target markets, and trafficking trends across the country. While much of our understanding about illicit drug trends comes from analysis of mortality data to examine shifts in causes of death over time, "crime lab data has the potential to be more quickly released than mortality data [and can be used] to predict and . . . warn specific locations . . . of increasing risks in the illicit drug environment" (Rosenblum et al., 2020). By providing

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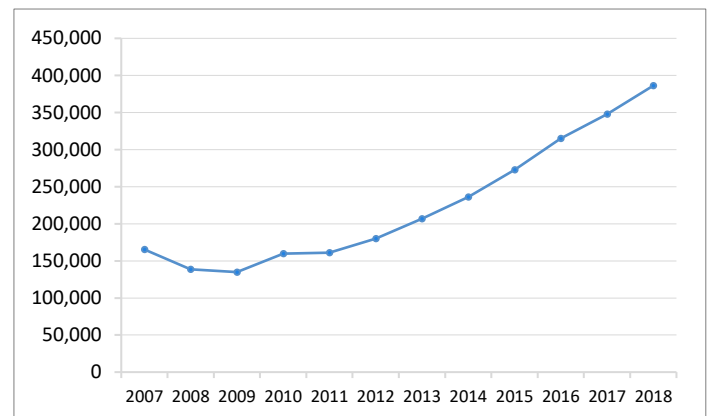
critical information about the contents of seized drugs, crime lab data can serve as “an early warning system to alert persons who inject drugs, harm reduction services, first responders, and law enforcement about changes” and allow for more rapid responses to “emerging spikes in overdose deaths” (Rosenblum et al., 2020). Additionally, these data can “alert us to new and evolving trends in the illicit drug market, such as changes in polydrug use and the recent substantial shift in the crime lab data towards methamphetamines” (Rosenblum et al., 2020).

Since our 2018 report, NFLIS-Drug data for 2018 and through mid-year 2019 have been released by the DEA. In addition, we have now included seizure data from the HIDTA program (2010-2019) and CBP (FY2012-FY2020TDJune) to provide additional context. The data for 2007-2018 are also now displayed in the NDEWS NFLIS-Drug data dashboard: <https://data.ndews.org/nflis/>. The dashboard was used to create Figures 1 and 2. Additional presentations of national, regional, state, and local data are available in the dashboard.

## In 2018, Methamphetamine Identified in 1 in 4 Drug Reports in NFLIS-Drug and the Rate (per 100,000) Increased Significantly in All Regions

- In 2018, methamphetamine was the most frequently identified drug in items seized by law enforcement nationwide and reported to NFLIS-Drug, followed by cannabis/THC (DEA, 2019).
- The estimated number of reports for methamphetamine increased steadily from 160,960 (9.7% of all drug reports) in 2011 to 386,272 (24% of all drug reports) in 2018 (DEA, 2019; Figure 1).
- Methamphetamine reports submitted to NFLIS-Drug increased 11% from 2017 to 2018 (DEA, 2019). This increase could reflect greater law enforcement focus on the drug as well as changes in its availability.

**Figure 1: National Trends of NFLIS-Drug Report Estimates\* for Methamphetamine, 2007-2018**



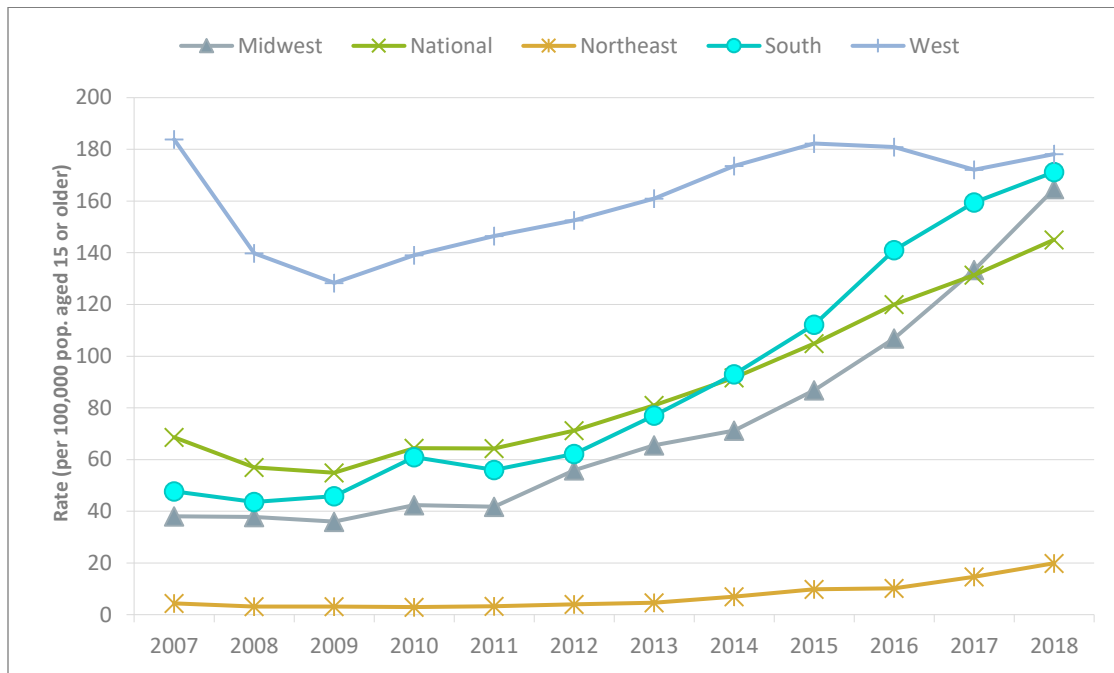
\*NFLIS-Drug Report Estimates: Estimates of drugs that are identified in law enforcement items submitted to and analyzed by state, or local forensic labs and included in the NFLIS-drug database. The Annual estimates are based on results of drug cases submitted to laboratories from January through December and analyzed by March 31<sup>st</sup> of the following year.

Please Note: Trends presented in this data visualization are the plotted line of the NFLIS-Drug estimates. For information on statistically significant changes, please see NFLIS-Drug Reports published by the DEA.

Source: Adapted by the NDEWS Coordinating Center from data provided by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Diversion Control Division. (Various Years). *National Forensic Laboratory Information System-Drug [Various Years] Annual Report*. Springfield, VA: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

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Figure 2: Regional Trends in NFLIS-Drug Report Estimates\* for Methamphetamine (rates per 100,000), 2007-2018



\*NFLIS-Drug Report Estimates: Estimates of drugs that are identified in law enforcement items submitted to and analyzed by state, or local forensic labs and included in the NFLIS-drug database. The Annual estimates are based on results of drug cases submitted to laboratories from January through December and analyzed by March 31<sup>st</sup> of the following year.

Please Note: Trends presented in this data visualizations are the plotted lines of the NFLIS-Drug estimates. For information on statistically significant changes, please see NFLIS-Drug Reports published by the DEA.

Source: Adapted by the NDEWS Coordinating Center from data provided by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Diversion Control Division. (Various Years). *National Forensic Laboratory Information System-Drug [Various Years] Annual Report*. Springfield, VA: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Source: Adapted by the NDEWS Coordinating Center from data provided by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Diversion Control Division. (Various Years). *National Forensic Laboratory Information System-Drug [Various Years] Annual Report*. Springfield, VA: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

As shown in Figure 2:

- Estimates of NFLIS-Drug reports for methamphetamine vary greatly by region of the country, but reports increased significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) in all regions. The highest percentage of methamphetamine reports was found in the West (47%), where methamphetamine was the most frequently identified drug. The lowest percentage (3%) was reported in the Northeast, the region with the highest percentage of heroin reports (14%) and cocaine (21%) reports (DEA, 2019).
- The rate per 100,000 of estimated NFLIS-Drug reports was consistently highest in the west from 2007-2018, but clear and steady increases were apparent in the South (56 per 100,000 in 2011 to 171.2 per 100,000 in 2018) and Midwest (41.7 per 100,000 in 2011 to 164.7 per 100,000 in 2018) (DEA, 2019);
- By 2018, the rates in all three regions were similar (Figure 2; DEA, 2019).

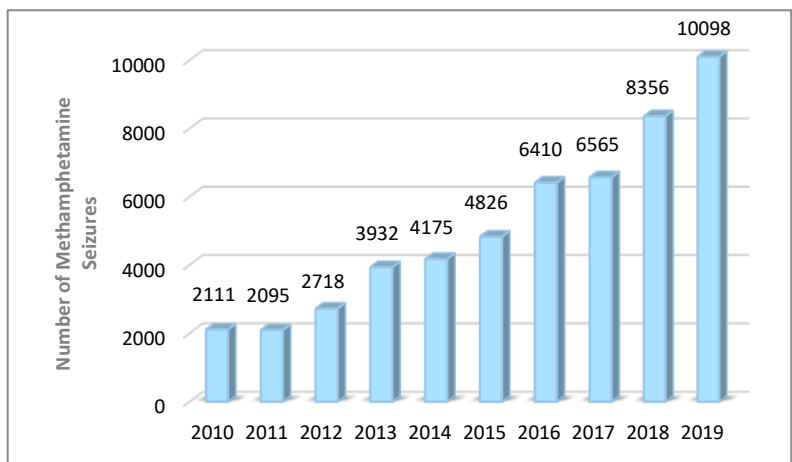
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The DEA's *NFLIS-DRUG 2019 Mid-Year Report* indicates that the increases in NFLIS-Drug reports nationwide and across all regions continued in 2019. "Methamphetamine was the most frequently reported drug in the West (47%), Midwest (28%), and South (27%) regions, while cannabis/THC was the most frequently reported drug in the Northeast (25%) region" (DEA, 2020, p. 1). Historically, the western region has had higher rates per 100,000 persons of reports than any other region, but in the first half of 2019, the rate in the Midwest region had surpassed the rate in the West region for the first time since 2001 (DEA, 2020).

## Number of Methamphetamine Seizures by HIDTA Initiatives More Than Quadrupled 2010-2019

In 2019, the Office of National Drug Control Policy's national High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Program included 28 HIDTAs, covering approximately 18% of all counties in the U.S. located in 49 states. The program is continuing to expand. As of July 2020, an additional HIDTA was added. HIDTAs currently cover more than 600 counties in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. Two-thirds of Americans are estimated to live in a HIDTA county. All HIDTAs report on drug seizures as part of the Performance Management Program (PMP).

Figure 3: Number of Methamphetamine Seizures by HIDTA Initiatives, by Year, 2010-2019



Source: HIDTA Performance Management Program (PMP) data run for NDEWS September 6, 2019.

The number of methamphetamine seizures by HIDTA initiatives more than quadrupled from 2,111 in 2010 to 10,028 in 2019 (Figure 3). Nearly all seizures (99%) are reported as kilograms seized. As shown in Figure 4, the amount of methamphetamine seized nationwide increased from 4,016.69 kg in 2011 to 15,344.50 kg in 2015 and then remained relatively stable in 2016 and 2017. The amount seized more than doubled from 2017

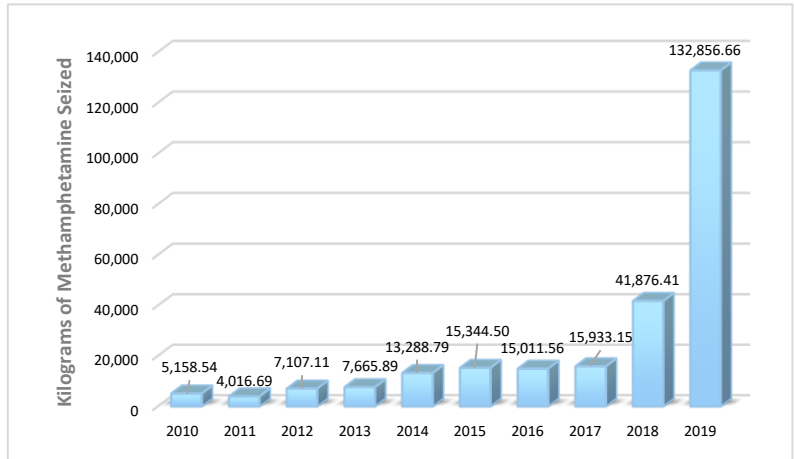
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to 2018 and more than tripled from 2018 to 2019. In 2019, nearly 133,000 kg of methamphetamine were seized through HIDTA initiatives (HIDTA, 2019).

In addition to the kilograms seized shown in Figure 4, small amounts of methamphetamine were also seized in the forms of dosage units and liters. Dosage units increased from 1 in 2011 to 24 in 2019. Liters seized increased from 12 in 2011 to 46 in 2019.

The states with the largest increases in methamphetamine seizures between 2017 and 2018 included Arizona, California, and Texas. During this time, seizures in California increased from approximately 5,282 kg to 24,342 kg, making it the state with the most notable increase in methamphetamine seizures by law enforcement agencies participating in HIDTA initiatives (HIDTA, 2019).

Figure 4: Kilograms of Methamphetamine Seized by HIDTA Initiatives, by Year, 2010-2019



Source: HIDTA Performance Management Program (PMP) data run for NDEWS September 6, 2019.

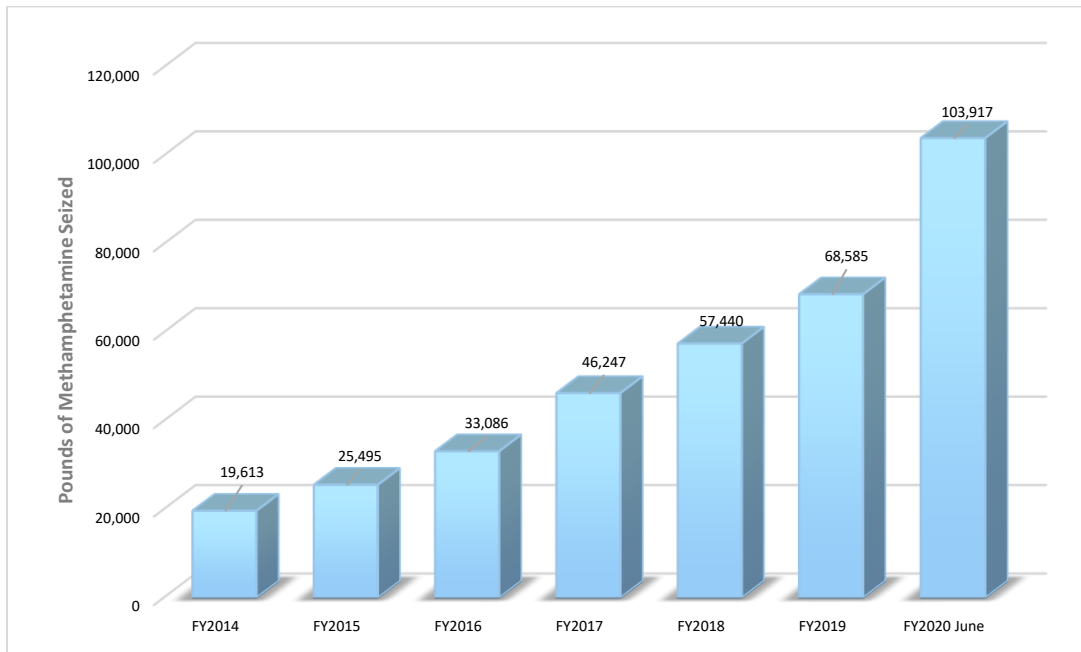
## Amount of Methamphetamine Seized by CBP OFO More Than Tripled from FY2014-FY2019

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reports on drug seizures at more than 300 ports of entry across the United States for each federal fiscal year (October-September). As shown in Figure 5, the amount of methamphetamine seized by the Office of Field Operations (OFO) more than tripled from 19,613 pounds in FY2014 to 68,585 pounds in FY2019. In the first nine months of FY2020, more methamphetamine (103,917 pounds) was seized than in all of 2019. From FY2014-FY2019, methamphetamine was the third most frequent drug seized after marijuana and cocaine. In FY2019, for example, 289,529 pounds of marijuana, 89,207 pounds of cocaine, and 68,585 pounds of methamphetamine were seized by OFO. To date in FY2020 (October 2019-June 2020), the amount of methamphetamine seized surpassed the amount of cocaine seized for the first time (29,302 pounds vs 103,917 pounds) (CBP, 2020). Though the numbers are much smaller, U.S. Border Patrol

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nationwide methamphetamine seizures also increased sharply from 3,930 pounds in FY2014 to 14,434 pounds in FY2019 and 10,259 pounds in the first nine months of FY2020 (data not shown, CBP 2020).

Figure 5: Pounds of Methamphetamine\* Seized Nationwide by OFO, by Fiscal Year, FY2014-FY2020 June



\*As of October 1, 2019, this category includes both Methamphetamine and Crystal Methamphetamine.

Source: CBP Enforcement Statistics Fiscal Year 2020. Data accessed July 20, 2020. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics>

## Conclusion

Sharp increases in methamphetamine seizures are apparent across all law enforcement indicators assessed. NFLIS-Drug data show increases across all regions of the U.S. through mid-year 2019. The number of methamphetamine seizures by HIDTA initiatives more than quadrupled from 2010-2019, and the amount of methamphetamine seized by CBP OFO more than tripled from FY2014-FY2019.

Information about 2018-2020 trends in individual NDEWS Sentinel Community Sites is available in the annual SCS reports and the summary reports available on the NDEWS website, [www.ndews.org](http://www.ndews.org).

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## Disclaimer

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