

Factsheet: Cocaine - the Irish situation

April 2025

Table of Contents

Glossary of terms.....	1
What is cocaine?	2
What does cocaine do?	2
How do we know how many people use cocaine in Ireland?	2
How many people use cocaine in Ireland?.....	3
How many people receive treatment for cocaine use?	3
How many people die from using cocaine?	5
Non-fatal overdoses and drug-related emergencies	5
What does the law say about cocaine?.....	5
Seizures of cocaine	5
References.....	6

Glossary of terms

Drug prevalence— refers to the proportion of a population that has used a named drug during a particular time period. That is, how many people in specific group have used a drug during a specified timeframe.

Last month prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that reported using a named drug in the 30-day period prior to the survey. Last month prevalence is often referred to as current use. Some of those reporting current use may be occasional or first-time users who happen to have used in the period leading up to the survey, so current use is not the same as regular use.

Last year prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that reported using a named drug in the 12 months prior to the survey. Last year prevalence is often referred to as recent use.

Lifetime prevalence – refers to the proportion of a population that reported ever having used a named drug before the time they were surveyed. A person who records lifetime prevalence may or may not be currently using the drug. Lifetime prevalence should not be interpreted as meaning that people have used a drug over a long period of time or that they will use the drug again in future.

Representative sample – a subset of a larger population that reflects the characteristics of that entire group.

What is cocaine?

Cocaine is a colourless substance obtained from the leaves of certain types of coca plant. There are basically two chemical forms of cocaine:

- [Cocaine](#) is a strong but short acting stimulant drug ('upper') which comes in a white powder. It can be used by dividing it into lines and snorting it up the nose with a tooter/snorter or straw. It can also be smoked or made into a solution to inject.
- [Crack cocaine](#) is a smokeable form of cocaine which is made by chemically altering cocaine powder to form crystals or rocks. It can be smoked, or dissolved in an acidic liquid and injected.¹

What does cocaine do?

Short-term effects

- Effects of cocaine start quickly but only last for up to 30 minutes
- You may feel more alert, energetic, exhilarated and confident
- Your heart and pulse rate speed up suddenly
- Hyperactivity, dilated pupils, dry mouth, sweating and loss of appetite
- Higher doses can make you feel very anxious and panicky
- Increased sex drive

Long-term effects

- Tightness in chest, insomnia, exhaustion and unable to relax
- Dry mouth, sweating, mood swings and loss of appetite
- You may become aggressive or even violent
- You may feel depressed and run down
- Damage to nose tissue
- Digestive disorders, dehydration and anorexia
- Kidney damage
- If you use it often you may lose your sex drive
- Injecting may cause abscesses
- Smoking may cause breathing problems
- Anxiety, paranoia and hallucinations, if you use a lot
- Weight loss¹

How do we know how many people use cocaine in Ireland?

The Healthy Ireland survey is an annual survey designed to increase knowledge of the population's health and health behaviours.² It is commissioned by the Department of Health, carried out by Ipsos

B&A, and conducted with a representative sample of the population of the Republic of Ireland aged 15 years and over. For the 2023 survey, telephone interviews took place between October 2022 and April 2023. 6,407 out of the total 7,411 survey respondents agreed to participate in the module on drug use providing a participation rate of 86% of survey respondents.

How many people use cocaine in Ireland?

According to the Healthy Ireland survey, in 2022/23:

- 8% of respondents report lifetime cocaine use. 2% report last year cocaine use, with 1% of the population reporting last month cocaine use.
- Men (3%) are more likely than women (1%) to report last year cocaine use.
- Cocaine use in the last year is most common among those aged 15-24 and 25-34 inclusive (5%), compared to 1% of those aged 45-54.
- Men aged 25-34 (8%) have the highest prevalence of last year cocaine use, compared to 2% of women in the same age group.
- Last month cocaine use is most common among those aged 15-24 and 25-34 inclusive (1%).

Table 1: Last year prevalence of cocaine use by age group (%)

	2002/03	2006/07	2010/11	2014/15	2019/20	2022/23
15–64 years	1.1	1.7	1.5	1.5	2.3	1.0
15–34 years	2.0	3.1	2.8	2.9	4.8	2.2

Source: unpublished data

For further information on cocaine use (prevalence and treatment) see our [Regional data factsheets](#).

Cocaine is, after cannabis, the second most commonly used illicit drug in Europe, 2.5 million 15-34-year-olds (2.5% of this age group) used cocaine in the last year.³

How many people receive treatment for cocaine use?

The [National Drug Treatment Reporting System](#) (NDTRS) provides data on treated drug and alcohol misuse in Ireland.^a When someone in treatment has been using multiple drugs, one is identified as their ‘main problem’ drug.

Cocaine was the most common drug reported in 2023, accounting for 37.6% of all cases, a 20.5% increase from 2022. Cocaine was also the most common main drug among new cases, accounting for almost half (46.1%) of new cases in 2023. Powder cocaine was the most common type of cocaine generating demand for treatment and accounted for 75.6% of all cases treated for cocaine as a main problem, while crack cocaine accounted for 24.4% of all cocaine cases.⁴

^a The NDTRS contains information only on those who started treatment in a particular year (for the first time or returning to treatment). It does not include the number in continuous care. Note: Cases are episodes of treatment not individuals, which means there is a possibility that individuals appear more than once in the data; for example, where a person receives treatment at more than one centre, or at the same centre more than once in a calendar year.

Table 2: Main problem drug (excluding alcohol) reported in 30 days prior to treatment, NDTRS 2017 to 2023

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
All cases	8,922	10,274	10,664	9,702	10,769	12,009	13,104
Cocaine	1,500 (16.8)	2,254 (21.9)	1,560 (24.0)	2,619 (27.0)	3,248 (30.2)	4,084 (34.0)	4,923 (37.6)
New cases	3,257	3,962	3,979	3,796	4,206	4,456	4,792
Cocaine	748 (23.0)	12.32 (31.1)	1,258 (31.6)	1,359 (35.8)	1,615 (38.4)	1,839 (41.3)	2,208 (46.1)
Previously treated cases	5,242	5,872	5,927	5,441	6,090	6,860	7,588
Cocaine	692 (13.2)	944 (16.1)	1,074 (18.1)	1,126 (20.7)	1,478 (24.3)	1,981 (28.9)	2,485 (32.7)

Note: N is the number of cases. The percentage is in brackets

Powder cocaine

In 2023, 3,722 cases were recorded with powder cocaine as the main problem:

- almost 8-in-10 cases (77.6%) were male, while 2-in-10 were female (22.4%)
- the median age when entering treatment for powder cocaine was 31 years
- powder cocaine cases resided in every county in Ireland. Almost half (47.1%) of all cases entering treatment for powder cocaine resided in County Dublin, followed by counties Cork (7.6%), Tipperary (4.9%) and Limerick (4.7%)
- 40.5% were in paid employment, while 49.3% were unemployed
- 5.4% were homeless
- 2.5% reported having ever injected
- the most common route of administration for powder cocaine was sniff/snort (97.6%)
- the proportion of cases with polydrug use was 61.8% in 2023. The most common additional drugs among cases with powder cocaine as a main problem were alcohol (63.6%), cannabis (50.8%), and benzodiazepines (23.9%).

Crack cocaine

In 2023, 1,201 cases were recorded with crack cocaine as the main problem:

- more than 4-in-10 cases (46.2%) entering treatment for crack cocaine as the main problem were female, while 53.6% were male
- the median age when entering treatment for crack cocaine was 39 years
- crack cocaine cases resided in almost every county in Ireland, with the exception of five counties (Galway, Leitrim, Kilkenny, Monaghan and Sligo) which had no reported cases. The vast majority (84.3%) of all cases entering treatment for crack cocaine resided in County Dublin, followed by Limerick (2.7%), Galway (1.8%) and Wicklow (1.8%)
- 6.5% were in paid employment, while 80.5% were unemployed

- 23.2% were homeless
- 36.3% reported having ever injected
- The most common route of administration for crack cocaine was smoking (97.2%)
- The proportion of cases with polydrug use was 65.4% in 2023. The most common additional drugs among cases with crack cocaine as a main problem were opioids (65.1%), benzodiazepines (39.4%) and cannabis (31.9%).

[For more detailed treatment data (age, gender, employment status) up to 2023 see library [interactive tables](#)]

How many people die from using cocaine?

The [National Drug-Related Deaths Index](#) (NDRDI) is a database of cases of death by drug and alcohol poisoning, and deaths among drug users and people who are alcohol dependent. In 2021, 354 deaths were poisonings. Cocaine was implicated in 3 in 10 (30.2%) poisoning deaths overall, the majority of which were among males (81.3%, 87). The number of deaths with cocaine implicated more than trebled (311.5%) (from 26 to 107 deaths).⁵

Table 2: Cocaine implicated in poisoning deaths, NDRDI 2012-2021

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
All poisoning deaths	273	324	311	310	307	325	361	375	439	354
Cocaine	26	32	42	46	42	55	79	108	140	107

Non-fatal overdoses and drug-related emergencies

According to the [Hospital In-Patient Enquiry \(HIPE\)](#) scheme there were 4,476 cases of non-fatal overdose discharged from Irish hospitals in 2023. Cocaine was present in 263 (5.9%) of cases.⁶

What does the law say about cocaine?

In Ireland, cocaine is on the list of drugs that are controlled by law. A person found in possession of cocaine powder or crack cocaine is guilty of an offence. You can find more information about Irish drug laws, offences and penalties on the [Citizens Information Board website](#).

Seizures of cocaine

Except for a 10% spike between 2013 and 2014, the number of cocaine seizures has decreased from a peak of 1,749 in 2007 to 364 in 2015. One possible explanation for this is that the economy in Ireland was not doing well in 2013 and 2014. Although an increase in cocaine analyses was seen in 2016 (63%) and 2017 (33%) Although a decrease of 25% was shown in 2018, this was followed by a substantial increase in 2019 (N=2231), when the number of cocaine seizures analysed was close to four times higher than in 2018 (N=595). The number of cocaine seizures analysed in 2020 was 11% lower than those analysed in 2019. However, since then an increasing trajectory was seen between 2020 and 2021 (34%), and again between 2021 and 2022 (50%). No new data is available for 2023. ⁷

References

1. Drugs.ie (nd) Types of drugs – Stimulants [Cocaine Crack Cocaine](#) [Accessed 22 April 2025].
2. Ipsos B&A (2023) [Healthy Ireland survey 2023 - summary report](#). Dublin: Department of Health.
3. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2024) [European drug report 2024: trends and developments](#) Lisbon: Publications Office of the European Union.
4. Lynch, T Condon I, Lyons S and Carew AM (2024) [National drug treatment reporting system, 2023 drug treatment demand](#). Dublin: Health Research Board.
5. Kelleher, C Riordan F and Lyons S (2024) [Drug poisoning deaths in Ireland in 2021: data from the National Drug-Related Deaths Index \(NDRDI\)](#). Dublin: Health Research Board.
6. Irish National Focal Point to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2025) [Ireland: national report for 2024 - harms and harm reduction](#). Dublin: Health Research Board.
7. Irish National Focal Point to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (2025) [Ireland: national report for 2024 – drug markets and crime](#). Dublin: Health Research Board.

And see also, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Europol (2022) [EU drug market: cocaine — in-depth analysis](#). Lisbon: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

For regional Irish data, please see our [regional factsheets webpage](#).

How to cite this factsheet:

HRB National Drugs Library (2025) Cocaine - the Irish situation. HRB National Drugs Library, Dublin <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/17308/>

Other Factsheets in this series:

[Alcohol - the Irish situation](#)
[Cannabis - the Irish situation](#)
[Gambling - the Irish situation](#)
[MDMA/ecstasy - the Irish situation](#)
[New psychoactive substances \(NPS\) - the Irish situation](#)
[Opioids - the Irish situation](#)
[Sedatives and tranquillisers - the Irish situation](#)
[Smoking - the Irish situation](#)
[Young people, drugs and alcohol - the Irish situation](#)

HRB National Drugs Library – Find the evidence

www.drugsandalcohol.ie

- Freely available collection of Irish and international drug and alcohol research
- Quick updates – e-newsletter, Drugnet Ireland and X (@HRBdrugslibrary)
- Key Irish data resources – treatment, deaths, prevalence, regional data, alcohol links
- Key Irish data summaries – factsheets & annual national reports

- Policy – policy webpage & Dail debates
- Practitioner portal – specific webpages for those working in the area
- Course directory
- Glossary – with explanations of terms and acronyms
- Research resources for those conducting literature searches and other research
- Search our collection – basic and advanced (you can save your results)

HRB National Drugs Library

w www.drugsandalcohol.ie

e drugslibrary@hrb.ie

X [@HRBdrugslibrary](https://twitter.com/HRBdrugslibrary)