Factsheet: Cocaine - the Irish situation 2026

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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 speeds up messages between the brain and the body. It can make you feel alert, confident, anxious or aggressive. Cocaine is made from the leaves of the coca plant.

- Cocaine can come as a white powder that people can snort. 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?

Cocaine can cause:

- increased temperature and sweating
- dehydration
- increased heart rate and chest pain
- increased blood pressure
- dry mouth
- dilated pupils
- lower inhibitions - you may do things you would not usually do
- increased sex drive - but you may lose your sex drive if you use it often
- low mood or thoughts of suicide
- problems sleeping
- sudden need to poo or diarrhoea
- hallucinations - you see, hear and feel things that do not exist
- loss of appetite - this can affect your health and energy levels over time
- nose problems - if you snort it often
- breathing problems - if you smoke it often
- heart, kidney or liver problems - if you use it often[1]

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, including alcohol and tobacco consumption.[2] A section of the survey asking questions relating to other drug use is included periodically. The most recent data for cocaine is from 2023.

How many people use cocaine in Ireland?

According to the Healthy Ireland survey, in 2022/23:[2]

- 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 15-34, see Table 1.[3]
- Men aged 25-34 have the highest prevalence of last year cocaine use at 8%, 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: Percentage of people reporting use of cocaine in the last year, 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: Mongan and Millar 2025

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, although prevalence levels and patterns of use differ considerably between countries. 2.5 million 15-34-year-olds (2.5% of this age group) used cocaine in the last year.[4]

How many 15–16-year-old students in Ireland use cocaine?

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) has conducted surveys of school-going children every four years since 1995, using a standardised method and a common questionnaire (see www.espad.org). The eight survey[5] was undertaken in 37 European countries during 2024 and collected information on alcohol, tobacco and other substance use among 15-16-year-old students. In Ireland the final sample included 1,880 students born in 2008.
The study found that:

- 11.8% of students in Ireland used cocaine in their lifetime, compared to 11.3% all ESPAD countries.
- More male (12.1%) than female respondents (11.3%) have ever tried cocaine (lifetime use).
- 10.2% of students had used cocaine in the last 12 months (recent use).
- 4.9% had used cocaine in the last 30 days (current use).
- Cocaine was considered to be the most easily accessible drug (14.3%).

For further information go to the ESPAD data portal where you can search for “cocaine” and filter by Ireland.

The European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) has developed the **European Web Survey on Drugs** (EWSD)[6] in order to collect data from a wide range of people who use drugs. In 2024, Ireland participated in the EWSD for the second time. The 2024 Irish EWSD was an online, convenience, non-probability survey. The study population included people aged 18 years and over who lived in Ireland

and who had used drugs in the previous 12 months. The final sample for analysis was 2,406, of whom 63.1% were male and 35.7% were female.

Table 2: Last year prevalence of cocaine use by gender (%)

All	Male	Female
N = 2,406	n = 1,518	n = 858
46.0	45.3	47.8

Table 3: Last month prevalence of cocaine use by gender (%)

All	Male	Female
N = 2,406	n = 1,518	n = 858
22.2	23.0	21.4

Source: European web survey on drugs 2024: Irish results

How many people receive treatment for cocaine use?

The data are drawn from the National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS) which is the national database that records and reports on treated problem alcohol and drug use in Ireland. Treatment for problem alcohol and drug use in Ireland is provided by statutory and non-statutory services, including residential centres, community-based addiction services, general practices, and prison services. The dataset contains information only on those who started treatment in a particular year (for the first time or returning to treatment). It does not include service users in continuous care. As there is currently no national system-wide unique identifier in the Irish health system, the NDTRS records cases of treatment. In any given year, individuals may appear more than once if treated in different centres or if they return to treatment in the same centre.

In 2025, 15,422 cases entered treatment for problem drug use (excluding alcohol).[7]

- Cocaine was the most common drug reported in 2025, accounting for 42.4% of all cases entering treatment, a 23.6% increase from 2024.
- Cocaine was also the most common main drug among new cases, accounting for almost one-half (51.4%) in 2025 representing the highest number of cases recorded for any single drug over the nine year reporting period.
- For previously treated cases, cocaine accounted for 36.7% of cases, the highest number recorded to date.
- Between 2024 and 2025, the treatment demand for powder cocaine increased by 21.1% (or 834 cases), while the treatment demand for crack cocaine increased by 31.0% (or 412 cases).
- Over the period 2017 to 2025, there was a 335.7% increase in the number of cases where cocaine was the main problem drug.
- Cocaine (45.8%) was the most common additional substance reported by previously treated cases with polydrug use in 2025.[7]

Table 4: Main problem drug (excluding alcohol) reported in 30 days prior to treatment, NDTRS 2017 to 2025

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
All cases	8,922	10,274	10,664	9,702	10,769	12,009	13,104	13,295	15,422
Cocaine	1,500 (16.8)	2,254 (21.9)	2,560 (24.0)	2,619 (27.0)	3,248 (30.2)	4,084 (34.0)	4,923 (37.6)	5,289 (39.8)	6,535 (42.4%)
New cases	3,257	3,962	3,979	3,796	4,206	4,456	4,792	4,771	5,134
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)	2,235 (46.8)	2,637 (51.4)
Previously treated cases	5,242	5,872	5,927	5,441	6,090	6,860	7,588	7,717	9,333
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)	2,764 (35.8)	3,421 (36.7)

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

Powder cocaine

In 2025, 4,793 cases were recorded with powder cocaine as the main problem:

- 76.2% were male, while 23.6% were female
- the median age when entering treatment for powder cocaine was 32 years
- powder cocaine cases resided in every county in Ireland. Most cases (44.4%) entering treatment for powder cocaine resided in County Dublin, followed by Cork (6.8%) and Limerick (5.0%).
- 37.7% were in paid employment, while 54.4% were unemployed
- 5.5% were homeless
- 2.3% reported having ever injected
- the most common route of administration for power cocaine was sniff/snort (96.5%)
- the proportion of cases with polydrug use was 60.5% in 2025. The most common additional drugs among cases with powder cocaine as a main problem were alcohol (64.3%), cannabis (50.6%), and benzodiazepines (22.6%).

Crack cocaine

In 2025, 1,741 cases were recorded with crack cocaine as the main problem:

- more than 4-in-10 cases (44.8%) entering treatment for crack cocaine as the main problem were female, while 55.1% were male
- the median age when entering treatment for crack cocaine was 40 years
- crack cocaine cases resided in almost every county in Ireland, with the exception of three counties (Leitrim, Mayo and Monaghan) which had no reported cases. The vast majority (74.4%) of all cases entering treatment for crack cocaine resided in County Dublin, followed by Limerick (11.9%)
- 5.2% were in paid employment, while 79.2% were unemployed
- 23.7% were homeless

- 25.7% reported having ever injected
- The most common route of administration for crack cocaine was smoking (96.1%)
- The proportion of cases with polydrug use was 63.5% in 2025. The most common additional drugs among cases with crack cocaine as a main problem were opioids (56.3%), cannabis (41.0%) and benzodiazepines (40.0%)

[For more detailed treatment data (age, gender, employment status) up to 2025 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 alcohol and other drug poisoning, and deaths among drug users and people who are alcohol dependent. In 2022, 343 deaths were poisonings. Cocaine (56.0%) was the most common drug used and was implicated in 1 in 10 (33.5%) poisoning deaths overall, the majority of which were among males (80.9%, 93). The largest ten-year increase was for cocaine (a 259.4% increase).[8]

Table 4: Cocaine implicated in poisoning deaths, NDRDI 2013-2022

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
All poisoning deaths	324	311	309	309	326	363	379	446	373	343
Cocaine	32	42	47	46	55	79	108	141	114	115

Non-fatal overdoses and drug-related emergencies

According to the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE) scheme there were 4,381 cases of non-fatal overdose discharged from Irish hospitals in 2024. Cocaine was present in 306 (7.0%) of cases.[9]

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

Overall, in 2023, 137 cocaine seizures were submitted to FSI for quantification analysis, of which 34 seizures were classified as street-level substances and 79 seizures were classified as importation-level substances. The dates of seizures ranged from 1 January 2023 to 21 December 2023. Consistent with the findings between 2016 and 2022, overall, the most prominent adulterants in 2023 were benzocaine, followed by levamisole and caffeine [10] An Garda Síochána reported drug seizures of cocaine in 2025 (Garda Only) as 973,888 grams with a value of € 68,172,155. [11]

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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.

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