

Drug Testing Data at the Vermont Department of Health

September 2026

The Vermont Department of Health has three complementary data sets that allow for the monitoring and tracking of the substances that contribute to overdoses in Vermont:

- State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS)
- Community Drug Checking Program
- Biosurveillance Program

Together, they provide a more comprehensive picture of the drug landscape in Vermont than any one data set by itself. This document provides an overview of each of these data sets and the programs that produce or manage the data. Each data set has both strengths and limitations, and comparisons between the results of each should be made with care considering the significant differences between each data set.

Each data source tests for different substances in different ways, and none of these tests will find a new substance that it's not actively testing for.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact AHS.VDHDSU@vermont.gov.



State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System

Background

The State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS) is a database of unintentional and undetermined intent drug overdose fatalities. The system collects detailed data on the injury, intervention, toxicology, and circumstances of an overdose death. We use these data to better understand how the death happened and to inform prevention efforts.

Data Availability

- Data are available starting in 2016. The data are available about a year after the date of death.
- Aggregate numbers are available to the public, with values less than six suppressed.

Who/what is represented in the data?

- SUDORS includes all people who died from an unintentional or undetermined intent drug overdose that occurred within the state of Vermont, regardless of their residency.
- SUDORS includes information about the circumstances tied to each death with data from:
 - Autopsy reports, including toxicology results
 - Chief medical examiner reports
 - Law enforcement reports
 - Statewide Incident Reporting Network (SIREN) – a database of emergency medical services (EMS) incidents from across the state of Vermont
 - Vermont Health Information Exchange (VHIE)– a database of medical records from participating hospitals
 - Vermont Prescription Monitoring System (VPMS)– a database with information on Schedule II-IV drugs prescribed in Vermont.

How are the data collected and analyzed?

- All death certificates from Vermont Vital Statistics are reviewed to determine if they qualify as an overdose based on national guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Once a death is confirmed as meeting inclusion criteria, SUDORS staff gather information from the sources listed above.

- All toxicology tests are performed by [National Medical Services \(NMS\) Labs](#), and the results are shared with the Vermont Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and made available to SUDORS staff.
- The data collected by SUDORS staff are housed in a national database, hosted by the CDC. The Vermont Department of Health serves as the owner of SUDORS data from Vermont.
- SUDORS data are used to inform multiple data projects across the Division of Substance Use Programs at the Vermont Department of Health. Statistical analyses for these projects are completed by the SUDORS staff.

Funding

- Data collection and analysis are currently funded through the CDC's [Overdose Data to Action \(OD2A\)](#) grant. From 2016-2018, the CDC's Enhanced State Opioid Overdose Surveillance (ESOOS) grant funded this work.

Other Considerations

- Toxicology results are usually postmortem (after death) but may be antemortem (before death), where available and appropriate (e.g., hospitalization).
- Toxicology testing involves an expanded group of drug tests to identify prescription and illicit substances as well as some emerging drugs, but it does not include all drugs. Additional testing may be performed when there is suspicion of a particular substance that falls outside this expanded panel. This test would be performed at the discretion of the pathologist.

Data Products Using SUDORS

[Change in Method of Use in Fatal Overdoses 2019-2024](#)

[2025 Vermont Social Autopsy Report](#)

[Fatal Overdoses in Vermont by Age and Circumstance](#)

Contact Info

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Community Drug Checking Program

Background

The Community Drug Checking Program allows community members to bring samples to syringe service programs (SSPs) for testing, via test strip or in-house spectroscopy. Spectroscopy involves looking at patterns of colors in a sample to identify it. The primary goal of this program is to tell people who are using substances what is in their drugs and educate them on the unregulated drug supply in Vermont. This can help prevent overdoses and other negative health outcomes. SSPs submit data to the Department of Health on a monthly basis, including information about the sample properties, effects experienced (if the substance had already been used), suspected substance, and test results.

Data Availability

- Data collection began in September 2024 and is ongoing.
- 381 samples were reported to the Health Department in the program's first year. Sample numbers vary month-to-month.
- Data do not contain any protected health information or identifying information about people and is reported as aggregate counts.
- While the data are not publicly available, the Health Department has published [one data product](#) with high-level data from the program's first year and intends to publish additional reports as data quality and sample sizes increase.

Who/what is represented in the data?

- Samples submitted to four grantees at physical SSP sites and mobile units

How are the data collected and analyzed?

- Data are collected by SSPs and reported to the Health Department as of October 2025.
- The data set is owned by the Health Department Division of Substance Use Programs (DSU).
- Chemical analysis is performed on-site at SSPs by drug-checking technicians. Grantees use one of two spectroscopy methods: Raman or Fourier-transformed infrared spectroscopy. Additionally, two grantees send viable samples to the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education (CFSRE) for additional testing.
- Statistical analysis is performed by DSU with the assistance of the Division of Health Statistics and Informatics (HSI).

Funding

The Community Drug Checking Program is funded by the Opioid Abatement Settlement.

Other Considerations

The data only includes test results from samples that have been voluntarily submitted to the program, with the rare exception of samples seized and submitted by law enforcement. Testing results at CFSRE may not be available when samples are reported to DSU.

Data Products

[Vermont Community Drug-Checking Program Data Summary: Year 1](#)

Contact Info

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Biosurveillance

Background

The Biosurveillance Program tests serum and urine from people who come to emergency departments because of an overdose. The samples sent to this program do not include patient names. We know only the race, age and sex of overdose patients. This helps us track drug use trends across Vermont. Biosurveillance gives us near real-time information on what substances are being used in Vermont. Knowing what drugs patients have taken reduces risk and prevents overdoses by sending help where it is needed most.

Data Availability:

- The program started testing samples in 2024. Data is available within a few weeks of the emergency department visit.
- Through June 2026, 268 specimens have been analyzed.
- Aggregate data are available to the public.

Who/what is represented in the data?

- Drugs present in serum and urine from people who come to emergency departments because of an overdose
- Includes limited demographic data (sex, age, geography and race as white or BIPOC)

How are the data collected and analyzed?

- Urine and serum specimens from non-fatal overdose patients are collected at the hospital. The specimens are sent to the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory and tested for the presence of 75 compounds using liquid chromatography tandem mass spectrometry to detect a broad panel of targeted substances.
- The Vermont Department of Health Laboratory serves as the owner of the data.
- The Vermont Department of Health Laboratory partners with Health Statistics and Informatics to develop data briefs based on laboratory testing results.

Funding

This project is funded through the CDC's Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) grant.

Other Considerations

- Current laboratory tests are designed to detect known substances, but about one in four samples do not contain any of the substances on the test panel. This suggests that we may be missing new or unexpected substances. It is important to continuously add emerging substances to the test panel, a process that requires advanced laboratory technology and knowledge of the drug supply. This will allow detection of a broader range of substances, strengthen real-time surveillance, and help healthcare providers and public health officials respond more quickly to emerging drug threats.

Contact Info

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