

Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2023-24

Drug use and dependence estimates for Kent

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Produced by

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1.1 Introduction

This report summarises data on drug use and dependence published by NHS England in November 2025 as part of the 2023-24 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) [1]. The APMS is England's national mental health survey series that, since the 1990s, measures the prevalence of both treated and untreated psychiatric disorders in adults (aged 16+) and tracks changes in mental health and service use over time.

The following analysis applies prevalence estimates for England, as published in the APMS, to the most recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year population estimates for Kent. Where available, upper and lower bounds are presented to reflect published uncertainty in the underlying data due to survey sample sizes.

This publication from the APMS describes the prevalence of patterns of drug use and dependence in the general population. All participants in 2023/24 were asked about their lifetime and past-year use of a range of drugs as part of the self-completion section of the interview.

The survey includes questions designed to identify risky or harmful drug use and signs of dependence. For this report we focus on those who have used drugs in the last year, and those reporting signs of dependence in the last year, highlighting the need for intervention or specialist treatment and links with mental health.

1.2 Key Findings

- In the 2023/24 APMS, **10.6%** of respondents reported using drugs in the last year, which would equate to **140,000 adults in Kent**, an **increase** from the **8.6%** reported in the 2014 survey.
- **Cannabis** was the most common reported drug, with 8.7% of respondents reporting use in the last year, while powder cocaine (2.3%), ecstasy (1.5%) and magic mushrooms (1.2%) also in regular use.
- Increases were seen for many drugs between 2014 and 2023/24, including **cannabis** and **powder cocaine**. **Magic mushrooms, ketamine and amyl nitrate** notably had large increases.
- **5.4%** of adults aged 16+ reported signs of drug dependence in the 2023/24 APMS. This equates to between **61,000 and 84,000 adults** aged 16+ in Kent.
- Adults aged 16-64 reporting signs of drug dependence also **increased significantly** between 2014 (**3.8%**) and 2023/24 (**6.7%**).
- **Males (8.3%)** reported signs of dependence more frequently than **females (5.2%)**, but signs of dependence **more than doubled for females** between the 2014 and 2023/24 surveys.

- By age, those aged **16-24 (10.1%)** and **25-34 (10.5%)** were the most likely to show signs of dependence. Between 2014 and 2023/24, rates have **more than doubled** in the **25-34, 45-54, 55-64 and 65-74** age groups.
- By ethnic group, those from mixed / multiple / **other ethnic groups (7.8%)** showed the highest rates, followed by **White British (6.0%)**.
- Those who are unemployed (12.9%) or economically inactive (9.9%) had higher rates than those who were employed (6.5%). Those with problem debt were significantly higher at 15.9%.
- Those with a **limiting health condition (7.9%)**, and in particular those with a **common mental health condition (10.5%)** had higher rates.
- By deprivation, those living in the **most deprived** quintile had higher rates at **7.3%** compared to the **least deprived** at **5.5%**.

1.3 Prevalence and estimated numbers of AUDIT scores of 8+ and 16+

1.3.1 Drug use in lifetime and in previous year

Table 1 below shows estimated national prevalence and estimates for Kent. For the 2023/24 APMS, 10.6% of adults reported drug use within the last year, an increase from the 8.6% recorded in the 2014 APMS, and 33% have used drug in their lifetime.

Cannabis was the most common reported drug, with 8.7% of respondents reporting use in the last year, while powder cocaine (2.3%), ecstasy (1.5%) and magic mushrooms (1.2%) also in regular use.

Between the 2014 and 2023/24 surveys, increases were seen for many drugs, including cannabis and powder cocaine. Magic mushrooms, ketamine and amyl nitrate had significant increases between 2014 and 2023/24, although it should be noted there is a large degree of statistical uncertainty for those reporting drug use from the smaller categories.

Table 1 – Prevalence of lifetime drug use and use in last year from 2014 and 2023/24 APMS, and estimates for Kent.

Kent estimates 2023-24 - age 16+	England - lifetime Use	England - use in last year - 2014 APMS	England - use in last year - 2023/24 APMS	Kent - use in last year 2023/24
Any drug	32.99%	8.60%	10.60%	140,424
Cannabis	29.60%	7.19%	8.73%	115,707
Cocaine powder	10.27%	1.94%	2.33%	30,901
Ecstasy	8.59%	1.50%	1.45%	19,257

Table 1 – Prevalence of lifetime drug use and use in last year from 2014 and 2023/24 APMS, and estimates for Kent.

Kent estimates 2023-24 - age 16+	England - lifetime Use	England - use in last year - 2014 APMS	England - use in last year - 2023/24 APMS	Kent - use in last year 2023/24
Magic mushrooms	6.55%	0.36%	1.18%	15,601
Ketamine	3.97%	0.48%	0.97%	12,812
Amyl nitrite (poppers)	3.12%	0.48%	0.72%	9,506
Nitrous oxide	4.47%	NR	0.72%	9,506
Non-medical use of prescription opioids	3.17%	NR	0.71%	9,437
Tranquilisers	1.65%	0.40%	0.39%	5,125
LSD	4.97%	0.32%	0.33%	4,383
Crack cocaine	0.78%	0.17%	0.22%	2,878
Anabolic steroids	0.79%	0.15%	0.21%	2,760
Amphetamines	5.83%	0.52%	0.18%	2,384
Synthetic cannabinoids	0.72%	NR	0.13%	1,682
Volatile substances	1.04%	0.04%	0.11%	1,512
Heroin	0.68%	0.24%	0.10%	1,262
Mephedrone	1.21%	0.41%	0.06%	-
Methadone	0.43%	0.21%	0.05%	-
Methamphetamine	0.81%	NR	0.03%	-

1.3.2 Signs of drug dependence

Table 2 below shows the prevalence of signs of drug dependence and estimates for Kent by sex for the 2023/24 APMS survey. Males reported signs of drug dependence (6.7%) higher than females (4.0%). The majority were for cannabis users (4.3%) compared to other drugs (1.1%). Combined, it is estimated between 61,000 and 84,000 adults had signs of drug dependence in Kent. Between 10,500 and 20,000 were for drugs other than cannabis.

Prevalence figures for the South East region are also published, and show lower rates for both males and females than the national rates.

Table 2 – Prevalence of signs of drug dependence in adults aged 16+ for England and South East, with estimates for Kent, APMS 2023/24

Signs of drug dependence in last year by sex	England - 2023/24 APMS	South East - 2023/24 APMS	Kent - 2023/24 APMS	Kent lower estimate	Kent upper estimate
Males - aged 16+	6.7%	5.7%	42,805	34,146	53,465
Females - aged 16+	4.0%	2.3%	27,395	21,626	34,622

Table 2 – Prevalence of signs of drug dependence in adults aged 16+ for England and South East, with estimates for Kent, APMS 2023/24

Signs of drug dependence in last year by sex	England - 2023/24 APMS	South East - 2023/24 APMS	Kent - 2023/24 APMS	Kent lower estimate	Kent upper estimate
Adults - aged 16+ - any drug	5.4%	4.0%	71,500	60,818	83,933
Adults - aged 16+ - cannabis only	4.3%	3.2%	57,019	47,193	68,781
Adults - aged 16+ - other drugs with or without cannabis	1.1%	0.9%	14,481	10,491	19,966

Table 3 below shows comparisons from the last 4 APMS survey years for signs of drug dependence for ages 16 - 64. Rates were broadly similar between the 2000, 2007 and 2014 years, but there has been a notable increase between 2014 and 2023/24. Rates in males have increased from 5.2% to 8.3%, and rates in females have more than doubled from 2.4% to 5.2% showing signs of dependence. The larger proportion of the increases have been for cannabis dependence, although non-cannabis drug dependence has also increased.

Table 3 – Prevalence of adults aged 16 - 64 scoring 8 or more or 16 or more on the AUDIT questionnaire by sex for England and South East, with estimates for Kent, APMS 2023/24

Signs of drug dependence in last year by sex	2000 APMS	2007 APMS	2014 APMS	2023/4 APMS	% Change 2000 - 2023/24	% Change 2014 - 2023/24
Males – aged 16 - 64	5.7%	5.4%	5.2%	8.3%	46.0%	59.1%
Females – aged 16 - 64	2.3%	2.8%	2.4%	5.2%	124.5%	111.7%
Adults – aged 16 – 64 - any drug	4.0%	4.1%	3.8%	6.7%	68.3%	76.8%
Adults – aged 16 - 64 - cannabis only	2.7%	3.0%	2.8%	5.4%	100.4%	90.0%
Adults – aged 16 - 64 - other drugs with or without cannabis	1.3%	1.1%	1.0%	1.4%	3.3%	39.0%

Table 4 below shows the prevalence of signs of drug dependence and estimates for Kent by age band for the 2014 and 2023/24 APMS surveys. Overall, the prevalence is highest in the 16 to 24 and 25 to 34 age bands. Between 2014 and 2023/24, larger increases in signs of dependence have been seen in the older age groups with 45 – 54, 55-64 and 65-74 more than doubling, although those aged 25-34 also saw a large increase.

Table 4 – Prevalence of adults aged 16+ showing signs of drug dependence by age band with estimates for Kent, APMS 2014 and 2023/24

Signs of drug dependence in last year by age band	2014	2023/4	Kent estimate 2023/24	Kent lower estimate	Kent upper estimate
Age 16 - 64	3.8%	6.7%	66,263	56,292	78,107
16-24	8.3%	10.1%	15,409	10,268	22,715
25-34	5.0%	10.5%	20,600	15,196	27,632
35-44	3.2%	5.7%	12,399	9,166	16,682
45-54	1.6%	5.7%	11,697	8,560	15,892
55-64	1.0%	2.0%	4,253	2,694	6,686
65-74	0.3%	1.1%	1,842	889	3,793
75+	0.1%	0.1%	218	70	676

The table below shows the prevalence of signs of drug dependence by ethnic group for the 2023/24 APMS. Those from mixed / multiple / other ethnic groups showed the highest rates, followed by White British. It should be noted there is low statistical confidence for smaller ethnic groups due to low numbers in the survey samples.

Table 5 – Prevalence of adults aged 16+ showing signs of drug dependence by ethnic group with estimates for Kent, APMS 2023/24

Signs of drug dependence in last year by ethnic group	2023/4 Prevalence	2023/24 Lower Confidence Interval	2023/24 Upper Confidence Interval
Adults Asian/ Asian British	1.4%	0.5%	3.7%
Adults Black/ Black British	4.8%	2.5%	8.8%
Adults Mixed/ multiple/ other	7.8%	4.0%	14.8%
Adults White British	6.0%	4.9%	7.2%
Adults White other	5.3%	2.8%	9.9%

Table 6 below summarises other characteristics and categories of drug dependence published in the 2023/24 APMS for England. Those who are unemployed (12.9%) or economically inactive (9.9%) had higher rates than those who were employed (6.5%). Those with problem debt were significantly higher at 15.9%. Those with a limiting

health condition, and in particular those with a common mental health condition also had higher rates.

By deprivation, those living in the most deprived quintile had higher rates at 7.3% compared to the least deprived at 5.5%.

Table 6 – Prevalence of signs of drug dependence by other characteristic, 2023/24 APMS survey.

Category	Any drug dependence, 2023/24
Employed	6.5%
Unemployed	12.9%
Economically inactive	9.9%
Has problem debt	15.9%
Least deprived quintile	5.5%
Most deprived quintile	7.3%
Limiting physical health condition	7.9%
Common mental health condition	10.5%

Table 7 below shows the respondent's opinion if they have ever had a drug dependence, if they have received a professional diagnosis, or if they have ever received treatment or support for a mental or emotional problem.

Overall, 2.2% of respondents thought they had ever had a drug dependence, compared to 24.9% of those who screened positive from the questionnaire. Of those who had screened positive, 6.3% had received a professional diagnosis in the past. 33.4% had ever received treatment or support, compared to 14.6% of all survey respondents.

Table 7 - Prevalence of drug dependence for England by self-diagnosis or professional diagnosis of dependence, and those who have receives support for mental or emotional problems, 2023/24 APMS survey.

Drug treatment	All aged 16+	Positive for drug dependence
Participant thinks they have had drug dependence	2.2%	24.9%

Table 7 - Prevalence of drug dependence for England by self-diagnosis or professional diagnosis of dependence, and those who have receives support for mental or emotional problems, 2023/24 APMS survey.

Drug treatment	All aged 16+	Positive for drug dependence
Professional ever diagnosed drug dependence	0.7%	6.3%
Professional diagnosed drug dependence and present in past 12 months	0.4%	4.1%
Ever received treatment or support for mental or emotional problems	14.6%	33.4%

1.4 References

- [1] "Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England, 2023/4 - Chapter 6: Drug use and dependence," November 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/survey-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-england-2023-24/drug-use-and-dependence>.