

Population Health & Healthcare Surveillance
Analysis of deaths from drug misuse across the North East and North Cumbria

November 2022

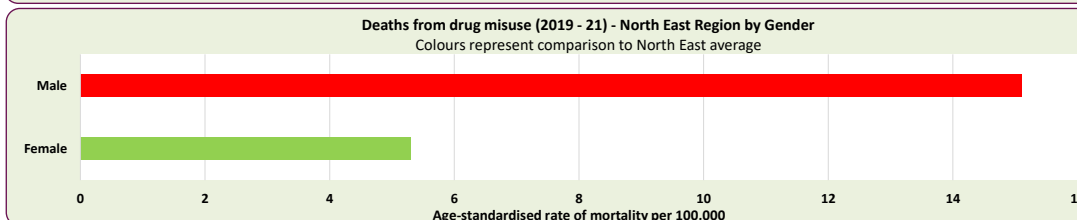
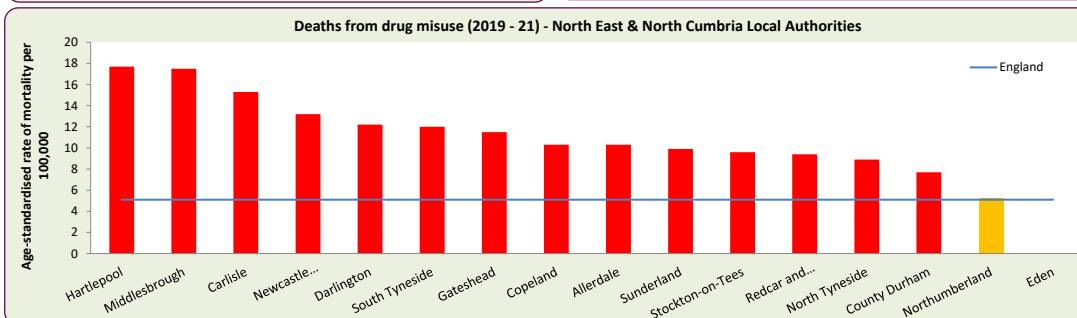
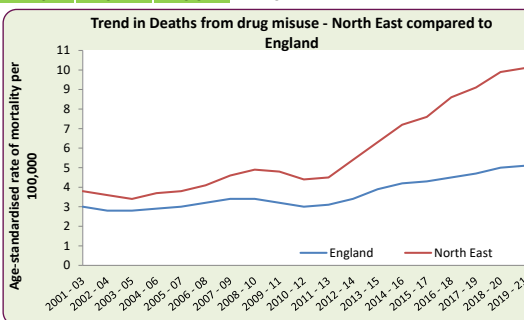
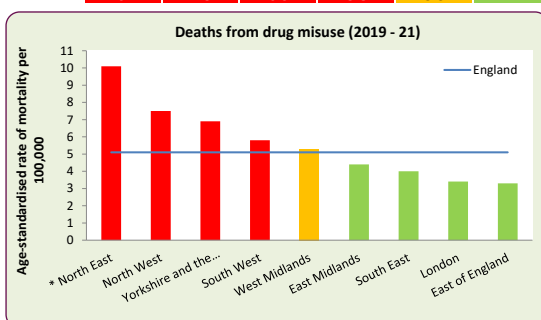
Compared with England

Significantly Better Similar Significantly Worse

Deaths from drug misuse (2019-21)

Age-standardised mortality rate from drug misuse per 100,000 population.

North East	North West	Yorkshire and the Humber	South West	West Midlands	East Midlands	South East	London	East of England	England
10.1	7.5	6.9	5.8	5.3	4.4	4.0	3.4	3.3	5.1



Data source: Office for National Statistics. (2022). Deaths related to drug poisoning by local authority, England and Wales.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/drugmisusedeathsbylocalauthority>. © Crown copyright 2022

Definitions / Notes

There were no data available for Eden. This was due to the fact that the number of deaths in each of these areas was fewer than 10, a number considered too few from which to calculate directly standardised rates reliably, and therefore the data has been suppressed.

Please note: Figures in the charts above are based on deaths registered in each calendar year, rather than the date on which the death occurs. Death registration delays in 2021 were the highest on record and have affected the figures for 2021 with around half of the deaths reported for 2021 having occurred in the previous year¹.

What is the data telling us?

During the period 2019-21 the population in the North East region experienced mortality rates from drug misuse which were higher than any other region and significantly higher than the national rate. During this period the mortality rate in the North East was almost double the national average; 10.1 per 100,000 compared with 5.1 per 100,000 nationally.

Trend data show increasing mortality rates both regionally and nationally although the picture is significantly worse in the North East. Since 2012-14 rates in the North East have been increasing more sharply than those in England so the gap continues to widen. In fact the North East has had the highest rate of drug misuse deaths of any English region for nine consecutive years¹.

During 2019-21, fourteen out of the sixteen local authorities in the North East and North Cumbria region had rates which were significantly above the national average and there was over a three fold difference between the area with the lowest rate (Northumberland - 5.3 per 100,000) and that with the highest (Hartlepool - 17.7 per 100,000). Regionally there are marked gender differences with males experiencing much higher deaths from drug misuse rates than females.

A number of possible reasons have been suggested for the increasing mortality from drug misuse. In their 2021 release of deaths related to drug poisoning¹, the ONS puts forward the following explanations: 'the ageing cohort of drug users, likely to be suffering from the effects of long-term drug use and becoming increasingly susceptible to a fatal overdose,' 'new trends in taking specific drugs, including gabapentinoids and benzodiazepines, alongside heroin or morphine, may increase the risk of an overdose' and 'there may have been an increase in disengagement or non-compliance with opiate substitute therapy.'

1. ONS. (2022). Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2021 registrations.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/bulletins/deathsrelatedtodrugpoisoninginenglandandwales2021registrations#drug-misuse-in-england-and-wales>