

## NDEWS Sentinel Site Report, February 2024: Trends in recreational ketamine use

**Seattle: Jason Williams, PhD, & Caleb Banta-Green, PhD, MPH, MSW**  
Anecdotally some use and the Statewide Community Drug Testing Network has detected ketamine, or related substances, in 7% of samples since 2023.

**St. Louis: Heidi Israel, PhD, FNP, LCSW, CCRG**  
Multiple clinics are using ketamine infusion to treat depression, chronic pain, and neurodegenerative disorders.

**San Francisco: Phillip Coffin, MD, MIA**  
Recreational use, no change in frequency.

**Denver: Devika Bhatia, MD**  
Recreational ketamine anecdotally is being used in substance use clinics.

**New York City: Alex Harocopos, PhD, MSc, & Elenie Tuazon, MPH**  
Does not show up often in surveillance data.

**San Diego: Annick Borquez, PhD**  
Ketamine has been popular in the night scene for the best part of a decade.

**Kentucky: Dana Quesinberry, JD, DrPH**  
There has been historically some findings of ketamine. The trend is stable.

**Phoenix: James K. Cunningham, PhD**  
Phoenix has not heard much about recreational ketamine.

**Atlanta: Matthew Myers, MS, MPA**  
Rarely detected in illicit drug seizures.

**National Survivors Union: Katy Simon**  
Ketamine is huge in Oakland, especially among trans people. NC Survivors Union has had cases of "ketamine" testing as cocaine in FTIR testing.

**Florida: Bruce Goldberger, PhD**  
Reports of the recreational use of ketamine in south Florida.

**Sites with no information at this time:**  
Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Washington, DC

**Texas: Dayong Lee, PhD**  
There is no indication of an increase in prevalence of recreational ketamine use in Texas. In contrast, phencyclidine (PCP), another dissociative anesthetic closely related to ketamine, continues to be prevalently used for recreational purposes.

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Atlanta: Matthew Myers, MS, MPA

Despite the establishment of medical ketamine clinics in recent years, ketamine is rarely detected in illicit drug seizures. Over the last three months there have been less than 5 ketamine confirmations, equating to less than 0.0007% of analyses. Atlanta is not aware of any anecdotal indications of increased ketamine use in the area, it seems to be largely absent for the last several years.

Denver: Devika Bhatia, MD

Recreational ketamine anecdotally is being used in substance use clinics. In terms of news, the trial of Elijah McClain has dominated discussion of ketamine recently and very few are reporting on recreational use.

Florida: Bruce Goldberger, PhD

There are reports of the recreational use of ketamine in south Florida - primarily in DUIs and a limited number of fatal drug overdoses (when ketamine was not administered by EMS or in the ED).

Kentucky: Dana Quesinberry, JD, DrPH

There has been historically some findings of ketamine in post-mortem toxicology. The trend is stable.

National Survivors Union: Caty Simon

Ketamine is huge in Oakland, especially among trans people. The supply is all racemic but dealers try to buy/sell K that seems higher in the non-psychedelic R-isomer. Some people mix it with coke but that seems to be more common in New York. NC Survivors Union has had cases of "ketamine" testing as cocaine in FTIR testing. Also, in NC, many drug user organizers who have not used recreationally before are replicating ketamine therapy in an underground context. Many people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are excluded from ketamine therapy-especially known users of other drugs, despite preliminary findings on the efficacy of ketamine therapy for SUD.

New York City: Alex Harocopos, PhD, MSc,  
& Ellenie Tuazon, MPH

Nationally, drug users unions are still mostly made up of opioid and stimulant users. While polysubstance use has blurred those boundaries, ketamine users are still a very specific subculture. NYC does not hear much about ketamine use and it does not show up often in surveillance data.

Phoenix: James K. Cunningham, PhD

Phoenix has not heard much about recreational ketamine. The data doesn't indicate that much ketamine is being seized.

San Diego: Annick Borquez, PhD

Ketamine has been popular in the night scene for the best part of a decade in San Diego and no changes have been observed by the field team at the harm reduction coalition, but they mostly focus on street outreach.

San Francisco: Phillip Coffin, MD, MIA

Ketamine is used recreationally, with no identified change in frequency.

Seattle: Jason Williams, PhD, &  
Caleb Banta-Green, PhD, MPH, MSW

Anecdotally there is some use and the Statewide Community Drug Checking Network has detected ketamine and/or related substances in 7% of 1,274 samples submitted for testing since early 2023.

St. Louis: Heidi Israel, PhD, FNP,  
LCSW, CCRG

Multiple clinics are using ketamine infusion to treat depression, chronic pain, and neurodegenerative disorders.

Texas: Dayong Lee, PhD

There is no indication of an increase in prevalence of recreational ketamine use in Texas. Among driving while impaired cases submitted to the Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC, unpublished data), ketamine positive cases were just 1-2 cases per year in 2019-2023 and the drug was administered in hospitals. According to the NFLIS-Drug 2022 Public Data, there had been just 100 counts of ketamine submitted to seized drugs laboratories in 2022 in Texas.

In contrast, phencyclidine (PCP), another dissociative anesthetic closely related to ketamine, continues to be prevalently used for recreational purposes in Houston and Dallas areas. PCP has been the second or third most prevalent drug detected in driving while impaired cases submitted to the Houston Forensic Science Center in 2019-2023 (25-28% of drug positive cases). The NFLIS-Drug 2022 Public Data showed 793 counts of PCP submitted to seized drugs laboratories in 2022 in Texas. Recent repurposing of ketamine to treat treatment-resistant depression may increase overall use of ketamine in the future.