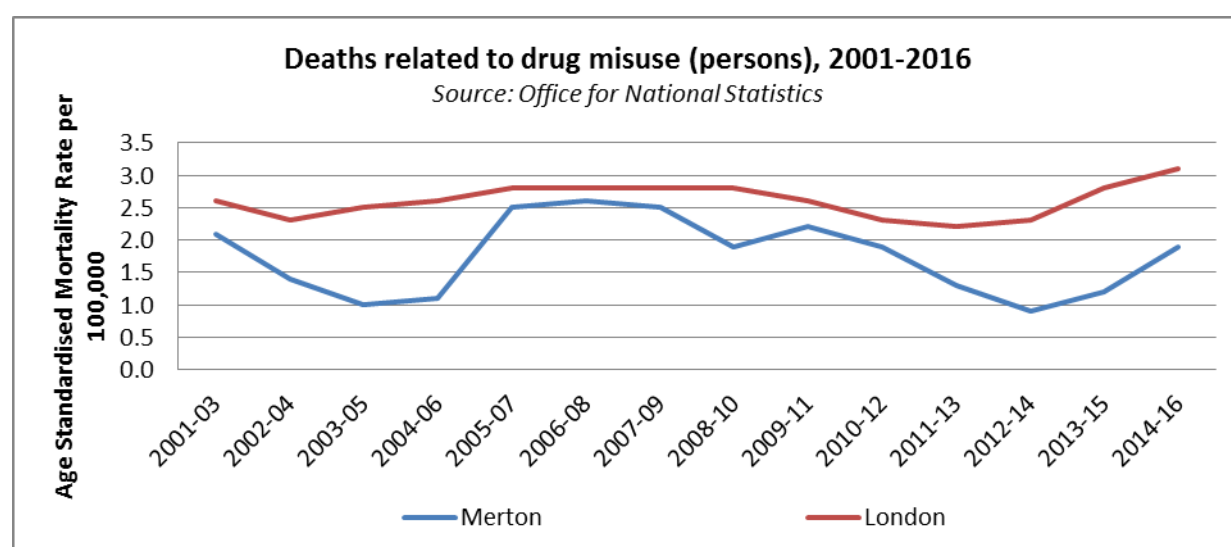


Drug related deaths in Merton

The Office of National Statistics releases an annual report looking at drug related deaths. The most recent report shows that the rates of drug related deaths (2016 data) remain very high both nationally and in London.¹ In August 2017, Public Health England (PHE) London's drugs and alcohol team took the opportunity to share some data, resources and guidance to support local areas to consider further actions to tackle drug related deaths. This factsheet summarises key points relating to drug related deaths in Merton, and local action to prevent these deaths.

Headlines

- The most recent data shows that between 2014-16, 10 drug related deaths occurred in Merton. On average this is just over 3 deaths per year.
- Rates (per 100,000 persons) for drug related deaths in Merton have fluctuated over time, with no clear trend up or down. The graph below shows data on drug related deaths since 2001.
- Merton has had consistently lower rates of drug related deaths, compared to London (latest data: 1.9 per 100,000 in Merton compared to 3.1 per 100,000 in London between 2014-16).



Risk factors for drug related deaths in Merton

- Males have much higher rates of drug related deaths compared to females in Merton, as nationally and in London. Drug related death rates in males in 2014-16 were 2.8 per 100,000 compared to 1.4 per 100,000 in females.
- Those most at risk of drug related death where illicit drugs are a factor, are injecting opiate users. Merton has a relatively small population of injecting opiate

¹ ONS Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2016 registrations
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsrelatedtodrugpoisoninginenglandandwales/2016registrations>

users when compared nationally.² In 2016-17 12% of those that presented to treatment in Merton reported current or previous intravenous (IV) drug use, whereas nationally the figure is 24%. Though a small population, the profile of this cohort is one of an aging population with increased health and social needs.

- The risks of drug related death for injecting opiate users released from prison, increases by 7.5 times in the first two weeks of release than at comparable other times.³ The causes of these increased risks are due to reducing tolerance to opiates whilst in prison, making them more susceptible to overdose on release. Engagement in treatment services immediately on release from prison greatly reduces the risk. In Quarter 4 of 2016-17, 25% of Merton residents released from prison into the borough with a substance misuse issue engaged with our community substance misuse services compared to 29.8% engaging with treatment on release from prison nationally. Though this level of engagement is low, it is an increase on the same periods in 2014-15 and 2015-16, and is being kept under review with the local treatment provider.⁴

What we are doing locally to tackle drug related deaths

In Merton we are working through our commissioned Adult Substance Misuse Treatment Provider to reduce incidents of drug related death by:

- Continuing to offer harm reduction/minimisation interventions such as ‘take home’ Naloxone⁵ for opioid overdose in people who use drugs, and Community/Pharmacy needle exchange, for service users to reduce health harms caused by substance misuse.
- Specifying within the new adult substance misuse service (to start April 2018) that ‘take home’ Naloxone be available to all IV drug users, carers and those that might come into contact with IV users.
- Identifying the aging cohort of opiate users and working with them specifically to address their health and social needs, and supporting them to move towards ‘recovery’.
- Working with our local ‘feeder’ prisons including HMP Wandsworth (men’s prison) and HMP Bronzefield (women’s prison) to identify Merton residents prior to release in order to ensure that those due to be transferred from prison to the community are supported to access treatment on the day of their release, and are appropriately followed up in the community.

² NDTMS – Adult Partnership Activity Report

³ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/depts/addictions/research/drugs/N-ALIVE.aspx>

⁴ Data source: NDTMS – DOMES report

⁵ Naloxone is a prescription medicine that blocks the effects of opioids and reverses an overdose, reducing the risk of drug related death.