



# The Influence of Drugs in VADOC Facilities

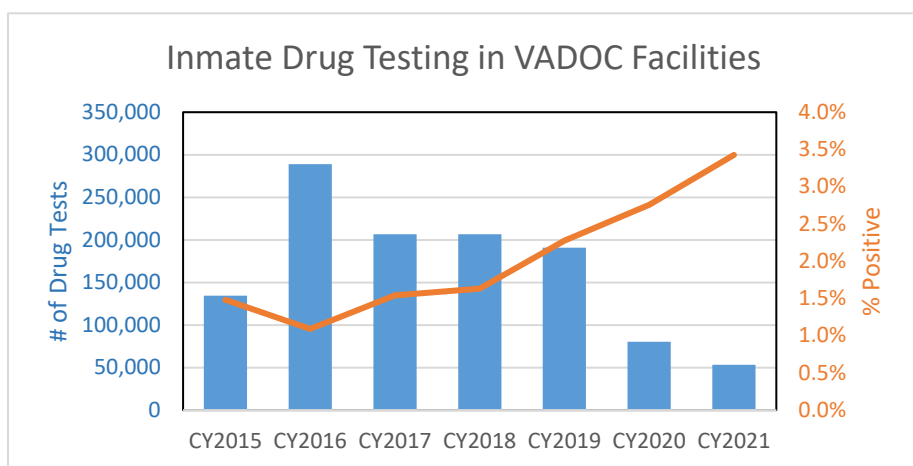
VADOC Research Unit

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While much attention is placed on criminal behavior associated with addiction and drug abuse, the destructive influence of drugs does not end at sentencing. The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) actively addresses addiction and drug abuse after sentencing. This includes risk and needs assessments that help the agency direct inmates with needs to appropriate programming and treatment as well as security measures aimed to keep inmates and staff safe in VADOC facilities and districts. Despite traditional security and treatment efforts, drugs continue to be introduced in to VADOC facilities resulting in inmate overdoses and deaths. As efforts to introduce illicit drugs in to VADOC facilities have heightened, security policies have been adjusted to try to counter these efforts and keep inmates in our care and staff safe. This summary report provides highlights of the influence of drugs in VADOC facilities from January 2020 through December 2021. It is important to note that this is an ongoing and escalating problem in prisons across the country. For example, in August 2018, 27 corrections staff in Ohio were sickened due to exposure to a combination of heroin and fentanyl while treating an inmate who had overdosed<sup>1</sup>. In June 2019 in Virginia, eight inmates at Haynesville Correctional Center overdosed on the same day.

## Drug Testing

Since peaking at 289,070 in CY2016<sup>2</sup>, VADOC has administered an average of 201,421 drug tests per year to inmates incarcerated in its facilities (median=206,523) through CY2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, drug testing in facilities was reduced in CY2020 and CY2021, with 80,352 tests administered in CY2020 and 53,387 tests administered in CY2021. Since similarly peaking in CY2016 when 31,860 individual inmates were tested at least one time, VADOC has tested an average of 21,395 individual inmates at least one time each year (median=21,495) through CY2019. In CY2020, 11,522 individual inmates were tested at least one time, and 8,079 individual inmates were tested at least once in CY2021. In CY2021, 1,185 individual inmates tested positive for illicit drugs (14.7%).



## Drug Overdoses

There have been 332 drug overdose incidents reported among inmates in VADOC facilities since CY2016<sup>3</sup>, averaging

Drug Overdose Incidents					
CY2016	CY2017	CY2018	CY2019	CY2020	CY2021
39	68	47	81	46	51

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/fentanyl-exposure-sickened-ohio-prison-staff/2018/08/30/23fcbbec-ac82-11e8-b1da-ff7faa680710\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/fentanyl-exposure-sickened-ohio-prison-staff/2018/08/30/23fcbbec-ac82-11e8-b1da-ff7faa680710_story.html)

<sup>2</sup> In February 2016, VADOC tested EVERY inmate in its facilities in order to gauge the prevalence of drug use instead of testing a random sample of inmates as detailed in [DOP 841.5 Inmate Alcohol and Other Drug Testing and Treatment Services](#).

<sup>3</sup> The incident nature for medical emergency transports for a suspected or confirmed overdose was added to CORIS in June 2016.


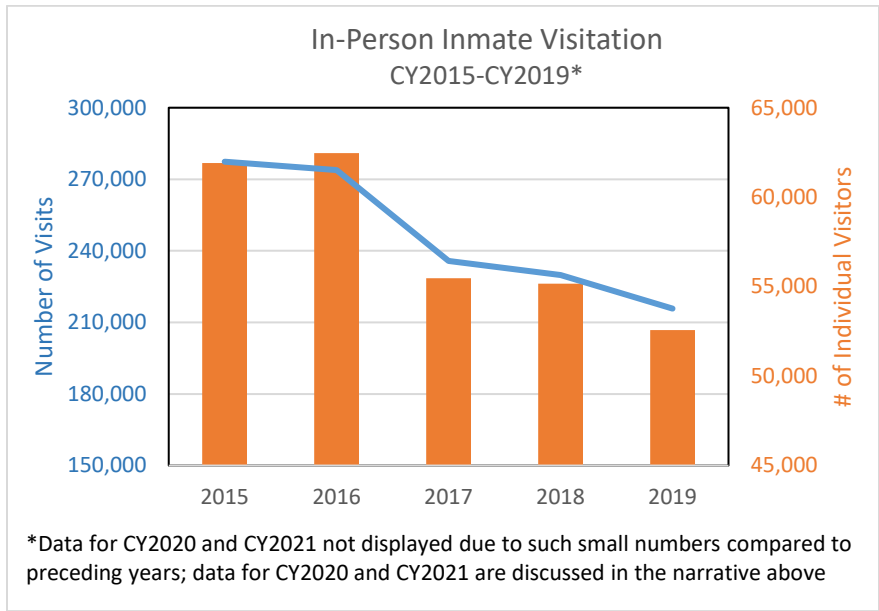
55 such incidents per year (median=49), but this number varies from year to year. Since peaking at 81 in CY2019, the number of drug overdose incidents decreased to 46 in CY2020 and 51 in CY2021. Despite the suspension of facility visitation beginning in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, overdoses continued to occur. Seizure of drug contraband in the mailroom increased, by 36 incidents during the first six months of CY2021, compared to the first six months of CY2020.

*Twenty-four of these 332 drug overdose incidents resulted in the death of the inmate.*

### Inmate Visitation

Between CY2015 and CY2019, 155,711 individual visitors made more than 1.2 **million** visits to inmates in VADOC facilities. During this time, these visitors made an average of 246,524 visits annually (median=235,741); however, the number of visits has declined, going from 277,371 in CY2015 to 215,797 in CY2019; possibly due to increased availability to other means of communication such as email. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, routine in-person visitation was suspended in March 2020 and only resumed in October 2021<sup>4</sup>. As a result, visitation for these two years is quite different from preceding years. There were 39,121 visits in CY2020 and just 3,034 visits in CY2021.

On January 19, 2019, a visitor to River North CC attempted to bring drugs into the facility by hiding them in her genitalia. On January 27, 2019, a visitor to Augusta CC attempted to bring Suboxone strips into the facility, also hiding them in her genitalia. Both visitors were arrested.

On February 2, 2019, a visitor to Buckingham CC attempted to bring drugs into the facility by hiding them in her genitalia. The visitor was escorted from the premises.



**162 Suboxone strips seized from a visitor**



<sup>4</sup> VADOC suspended in-person inmate visitation in March 2020; VADOC resumed limited in-person visitation in October 2021 using a new visitation scheduling system to facilitate physical distancing by limiting the number of visitors in the visitation room at any given time, but this process was suspended in December 2021 due to increases in the numbers of COVID cases; regular in-person visitation using this new visitation scheduling system resumed in March 2022. While in-person visitation was suspended, VADOC increased its capacity to offer video visitation and collaborated with community partners to increase the use of video visitation.

## Drug Interdiction Activities

While some procedures such as metal scanners, canine and body searches continue, VADOC has implemented additional procedures based on evidence of how drugs are introduced in to facilities. The following procedures aim to reduce/eliminate the introduction of drugs and other contraband into its facilities:

- VADOC has ADANI millimeter wave body scanners at 14 facilities (plus one mobile unit) to detect contraband on persons wishing to enter one of these facilities; these body scanners are used in addition to the metal detectors and x-ray machines already in place
- All incoming general inmate correspondence at Security Level 2 (SL-2) and higher facilities is photocopied; these photocopies are given to the inmate in place of the original documents which may have drugs embedded in them (see [DOP 803.1 Inmate Correspondence](#) for more information)<sup>6</sup>
- Inmates at SL-2 and higher facilities are required to change into state-issued jumpsuits without pockets prior to visitation (see [DOP 851.1 Visiting Privileges](#) for more information)
- VADOC rotates narcotic detection canine teams among its facilities to detect drugs on persons wishing to enter a facility
- The VADOC Operations Logistics Unit (OLU) conducts targeted drug interdictions at its facilities with local law enforcement and the Virginia State Police
- In January 2020, the number of approved visitors on each inmate’s visitation list was limited to 10 people (see [DOP 851.1 Visiting Privileges](#) for more information)
- To comply with changes made to [§53.1-30](#) of the *Code of Virginia* in 2020 that prohibit strip searches of minor visitors, VADOC revised DOP 445.1 Screenings and Searches of Inmate and CCAP Probationer/Parolee Visitors<sup>7</sup>
- During CY2021 there were 16 incidents where the agency intercepted a staff member attempting to bring drugs into a VADOC facility

### Visitors Found with Drugs<sup>5</sup>

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most in-person visitation was suspended in March 2020, and routine in-person visitation resumed in March 2022. As a result, the numbers of visitors was dramatically lower in CY2020 and CY2021 than in prior years. Likewise, the numbers of visitors found with drugs was dramatically lower than in prior years. In CY2019, there were 88 incidents where the agency intercepted a visitor attempting to bring drugs into a VADOC facility (see the January 2020 version of this report for a summary of these incidents; <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/media/1483/vadoc-research-influence-of-drugs-report-2020.pdf>). There were 3 such incidents in CY2020 and 3 in CY2021.

VADOC investigators received word that a visitor planned to smuggle drugs into Pocahontas State CC on February 17, 2019. When questioned, the visitor admitted to possessing drugs intended for an inmate and produced a package during a search. The visitor was arrested and taken to SWRJ-Tazewell.



<sup>5</sup> Before September 2019, there was not a specific incident nature to identify a visitor was found with drugs; therefore, the numbers in this report may be lower. In order for a visitor caught bringing in contraband to be identified in VACORIS, either: 1) the visitor had to be listed as a Participant on the incident report; or 2) the incident report had to have one of the following incident natures: “Any activity which requires intervention of outside law enforcement (other than routine P&P arrests);” “Possible felonies committed by volunteers, visitors, or inmates on DOC Grounds;” or “Seizure of Suspected Drug: In Visitor Possession.” The incidents were cross-referenced with information provided by the Operations and Logistics Unit’s weekly Institutions Visitation Data Report and Drug Related Incidents. Incidents were then flagged using a drug index search and unduplicated by the location and visitor involved. Visitors found with other contraband that is legal (i.e. alcohol or tobacco) in Virginia or suspected to be passing drugs to the inmate during visitation were not included in the total number of visitors found with drugs.

<sup>6</sup> In July 2022, VADOC will implement a centralized mail distribution center to receive, screen, and inspect all legal correspondence, books, and magazines mailed to inmates and probationers/parolees housed in a DOC facility.

<sup>7</sup> For security reasons, DOP 445.1 is not available online. For additional information, visit <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/general-public/freedom-of-information-act>