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Heroin reaches into rural Alaska communities

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) - Heroin has crossed beyond Alaska's urban centers, increasingly winding up in the state's more isolated, rural communities.

State investigators say the highly addictive drug has become more common in all parts of the state, including villages, the Anchorage Daily News reported Saturday (<http://is.gd/q0zy1K>).

The state's annual drug report showed the drug's availability increased throughout Alaska in 2012 and 2013. The report concludes that heroin is no longer confined to urban areas.

Authorities made 64 heroin-related arrests and charges in 2009. That number has since more than doubled, with 151 arrests and charges last year.

In Kodiak, police seized more than 25 ounces of methamphetamine and almost 2 ounces of high-grade heroin on April 19. It was the largest seizure in the police department's history.

In Nome, authorities began recognizing a growing heroin trend a couple of years ago when an officer found paraphernalia at a local hotel that appeared to be from intravenous drug use.

"We're finding it in a lot of the villages out in western Alaska now," said Lt. Katherine Peterson of the Alaska Bureau of Investigations. "I can't tell you in every village. But it is certainly unlike years ago."

In the recent Kodiak drug seizure, police estimated a street value of about \$35,000 for the heroin and \$2.1 million for the methamphetamine. Kodiak Police Chief Ronda Wallace said that between the two types of drugs, the local upturn in heroin is more recent.

"It's definitely a trend," Wallace said. "We've been seeing a lot more meth, but we've been noticing in the last few years that heroin is increasing."

In Nome, Mayor Denise Michels said the town has seen wider use of heroin the last few years among residents in their 20s. That demographic includes her nephew, who is completing a drug rehabilitation program in Arizona for heroin addiction, she said. He entered the program in 2012 after telling his family he needed help.

"Who would have ever thought that this would be here?" Michels said. "It happened so fast and so under the radar for the public."

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