

# Anti-Narcotics Agency Warns Moscow Faces Drug Crisis

By [Allison Quinn](#)

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Moscow's soaring drug-use and distribution rates have launched the city into the clutches of a "pre-crisis situation," city authorities warned on Wednesday.

The revelation comes on the heels of an expression of "cautious optimism" last month by Viktor Ivanov, head of the Federal Drug Control Service, about the prospects for Russia's war on drugs. Ivanov said at the time that the number of drug addicts nationwide had leveled out for the first time in decades.

An official with the Drug Service's Moscow Branch painted a much bleaker picture of Moscow's drug scene. "The situation surrounding the use and distribution of drugs in the capital should be described as 'pre-crisis.' Positive changes have not been observed by any indicators," Yury Devyatkin, deputy head of the Moscow Branch, said in comments carried

by Interfax on Wednesday.

Over the first half of the year, the number of drug users in the city climbed by 9.8 percent compared to the same period last year, with the total now standing at 40,701 drug users, according to Devyatkin. Drug use among minors has increased by 34.8 percent since last year. Drug-overdose deaths have grown by 13 percent.

Evidencing an uptick in drug distribution rates, the agency has confiscated twice the amount of drugs this year as it had by this point last year: more than 330 kilograms over the first half of 2014, compared to 160 in 2013.

Heroin has made up the bulk of confiscated drugs, weighing in at 255 kilograms. Amphetamines took second place, according to Devyatkin, followed by marijuana and hashish. Routes from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are still plagued by drug smuggling, he said.

"Most often, the transport of drugs is done with the use of secret stashes or by hiding the drugs underneath legal cargo. There have been cases of drugs hidden underneath vegetables: carrots, cucumbers, radishes, potatoes, as well as various packing materials and construction supplies," Devyatkin told Interfax.

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The country's struggle with heroin has contributed to the spread of HIV and AIDS, with intravenous drug users making up the majority of the HIV-positive population.

According to the Health Ministry, 463 out of every 100,000 Russians are HIV positive.

The World Bank estimated in 2013 that by 2020, the country would lose an average of 20,000 people a month to AIDS.

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Contact the author at [a.quinn@imedia.ru](mailto:a.quinn@imedia.ru)

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