
Statistics on pharmaceuticals 2024

In 2024, women retrieved more prescribed medication than men. More than 80 percent of those aged 75 and over retrieved medication for high blood pressure. ADHD medication was most common among adolescents and its retrieval continues to increase among people aged 10–29. Painkillers were more prevalent in areas with high socio-economic challenges.

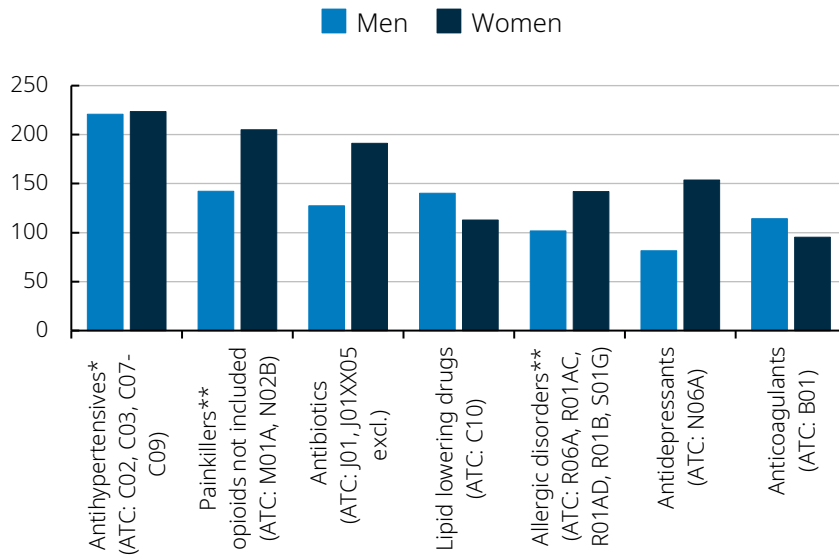
Women are retrieving more prescribed medication than men

In 2024, 68 percent of Sweden's population retrieved at least one prescription drug. For women, the proportion was 75 percent, including contraceptives. The corresponding figure for men was 61 percent. Antihypertensive drugs were the group of medicines prescribed to the largest number of patients. In the same year, almost 2.3 million patients collected this type of medicine from pharmacies, which corresponds to 22 percent of the population. The next most common drug groups were painkillers, antibiotics, drugs treating allergic disorders, blood lipid lowering agents, antidepressants, and anticoagulants.

Women retrieved more medications in all drug groups than men except for lipid lowering drugs and anticoagulants, which were retrieved by more men. The gender difference was greatest for antidepressants, which were retrieved by 15 percent of women compared to 8 percent of men. The gender difference was also high for painkillers and antibiotics. In 2024, 21 percent of women and 14 percent of men retrieved at least one prescription for painkillers, while the corresponding figures for antibiotics were 19 percent among women and 13 percent among men.

Figure 1. The seven most common drug groups in 2024, by gender

Number of patients per 1000 inhabitants



Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare. * Excluding C02AC02 and C07AA07 ** The group contains certain medicines that can also be bought without a prescription

About the statistics

The statistics show the number of people that have retrieved the prescribed pharmaceutical in question at least once during one year from a pharmacy. The statistics do not include pharmaceuticals without prescription or those distributed by institutions with their own pharmaceutical stocks such as hospitals.

Some drug groups include pharmaceuticals that are also available over the counter. Drugs are grouped into ATC codes based on the main indication, but often have several different indications. For example, drugs in the *anti-hypertensives* group are also used for other indications such as cardiovascular failure and ischaemic heart disease.

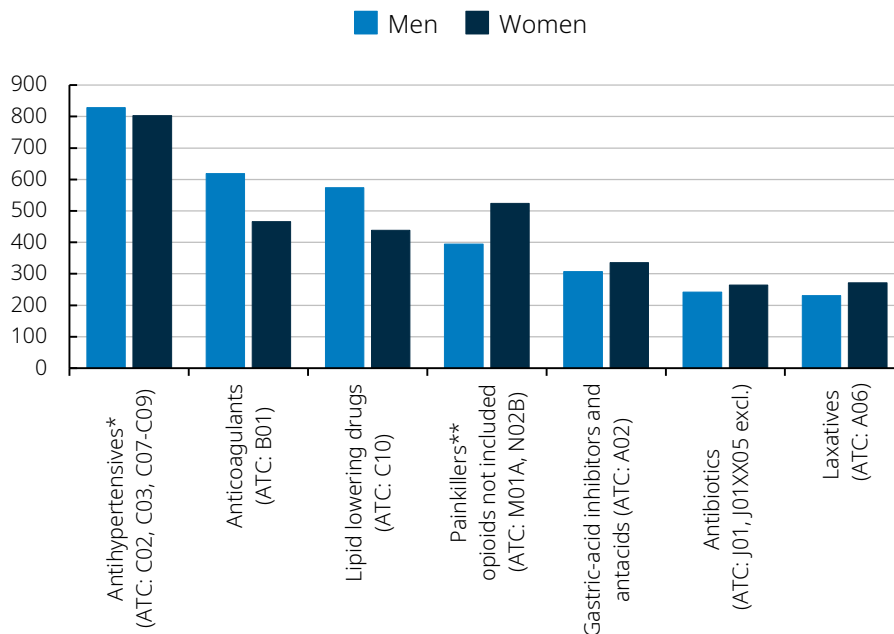
More than 80% of elderly take antihypertensive drugs

In 2024 more than 80 percent of people aged 75 and over retrieved antihypertensive drugs. The next most common groups of medicines among older people were anticoagulants, blood lipid lowering agents, painkillers, gastric-acid inhibitors and antacids, antibiotics, and laxatives. Among these groups, the gender difference was greatest for anticoagulants, which were retrieved by 62 percent of men compared to 47 percent of women. The

gender difference was also large for painkillers, but in the opposite direction: 52 percent of women compared to 40 percent of men.

Figure 2. The seven most common drug groups among people aged 75 and over in 2024, by gender.

Number of patients per 1000 inhabitants



* Excluding C02AC02 and C07AA07 ** The group contains certain medicines that can also be bought without a prescription

Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare.

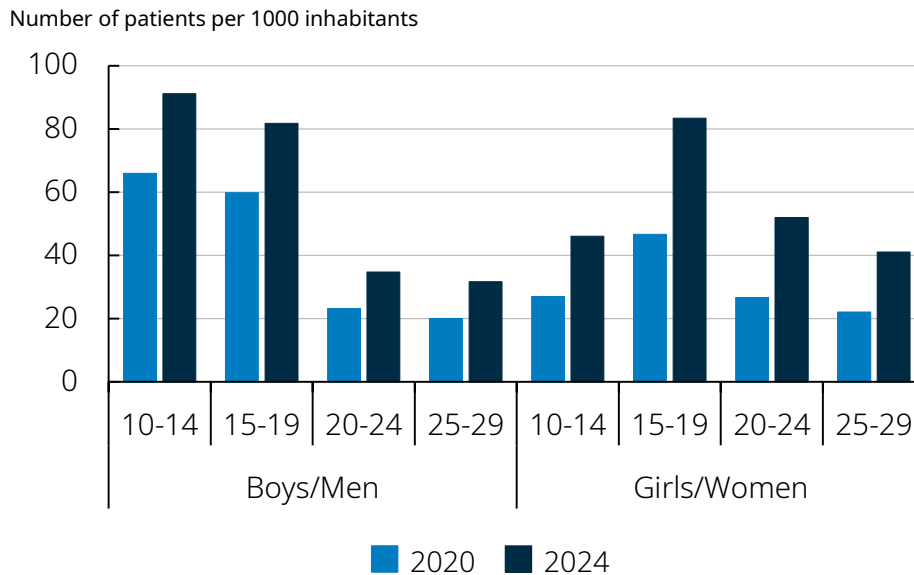
Retrieval of ADHD medication continues to rise among adolescents and young adults

The retrieval of ADHD medication has been steadily rising for many years. Over a period of five years, the proportion of women who retrieved ADHD medication increased from 1,2 per cent in 2020 to 2,3 per cent in 2024. Over the same period, the retrieval of ADHD medication among men increased from 1,6 per cent to 2,4 per cent. The increase was present in almost all age groups for both men and women.

Adolescents were most likely to retrieve ADHD medication when compared to other age groups. In 2024, 9,1 per cent of boys aged 10-14 collected ADHD medication, compared to 6,6 per cent in 2020. Among girls, retrieval was most common among older teenage years. In 2024, 8,3 per cent of girls aged 15-19 collected ADHD medication, compared to 4,7 per cent in 2020. In 2024, among those aged 20-29, women were more likely than men to collect ADHD medication, in contrast to 2020 when the gender differences were minimal.

Retrieval for ADHD medicines are likely to continue to increase since new cases of users are rising in most age groups. However, new cases among young adult men and girls of secondary school age are beginning to level off.

Figure 3. ADHD medicines among people aged 10-29 in the period 2020-2024, by gender



Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare.

Regional statistical areas and area type

In this fact sheet statistics are presented by area type, which is based on Sweden's 3,363 regional statistical areas (RegSO). A RegSO is a geographically delimited area that follows the county and municipal boundaries and is based on Sweden's population on the last day of December each year, i.e. for all living and registered individuals in Sweden.

The type of area is based on the socio-economic index (SEI), which is the average of three indicators in each RegSO: the proportion with pre-secondary education (20-65 years), the proportion with a low economic standard (regardless of age), and the proportion that receive financial assistance and/or long-term unemployment (20-65 years). A higher SEI value indicates higher socio-economic vulnerability.

Based on the number of standard deviations from the mean, a grouped variable, area type, is created, ranging from high socio-economic challenges to very good socio-economic conditions. The latest relevant year for RegSO and area type is 2024 and 2023 respectively.

Painkillers are more common in areas with high socioeconomic challenges

Prescribed painkillers (with ATC code N02B or M01A) are most commonly used for long-term pain conditions¹. In 2024, painkillers were retrieved by 23 per cent of the population in areas with high socioeconomic challenges, compared with 15 per cent of the population in areas with very good socioeconomic conditions. In all areas, women were more likely than men to take out painkillers. The gender difference was largest in areas with high socioeconomic challenges, where 27 per cent of women retrieved painkillers compared to 20 per cent of men.

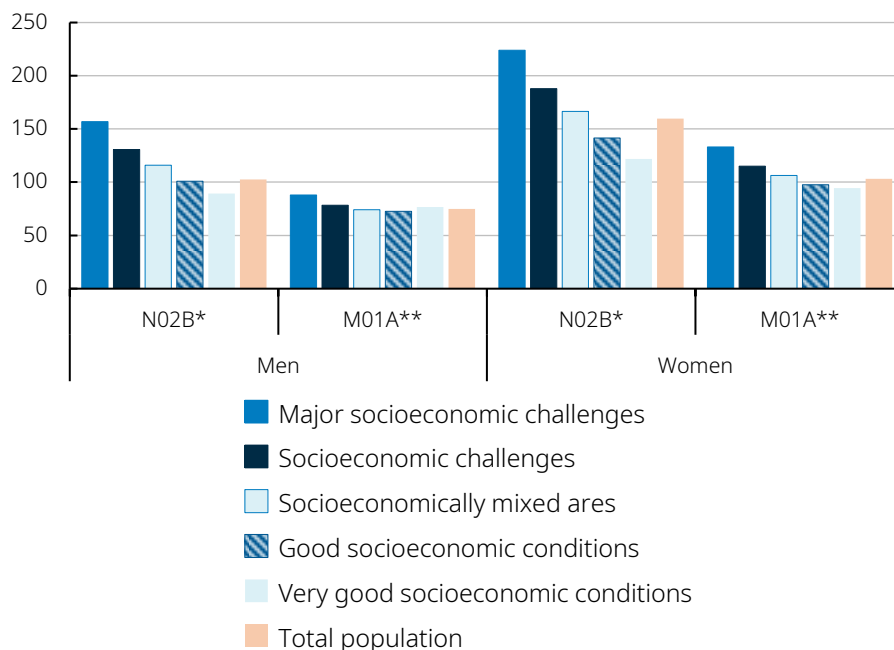
Retrieval for the painkiller in the medication group *other analgesics and antipyretics* (ATC code N02B, e.g. paracetamol) varied across areas: the better the socioeconomic conditions, the lower the level of retrieval – and vice versa. The differences between areas were largest among women: 22 per cent of women in areas with high socioeconomic challenges collected painkillers, compared with 12 per cent of women living in areas with very good socioeconomic conditions. The corresponding figures for men were 16 and 9 per cent respectively.

For the group of *anti-inflammatory and anti-rheumatic drugs* (ATC code M01A, e.g. ibuprofen), the picture was similar, but less pronounced, among women when compared to *other analgesics and antipyretics*. In areas with high socioeconomic challenges, 13 per cent of women retrieved this type of painkiller, compared with 9 per cent of women living in areas with very good socioeconomic conditions. Among men, the differences across areas were minimal.

¹ The medication group ‘painkillers’ contains medications that are also used for conditions other than pain. For example, N02B includes medications that are even used for epilepsy.

Figure 4. Painkillers in 2024, by sex and area type

Number of patients per 1000 inhabitants



Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare. Painkillers as a drug group includes some medicines that can also be bought without a prescription. *N02B: Other analgesics and antipyretics. **M01A Anti-inflammatory and antirheumatic products, non-steroids.

More information

You can find more tables, graphs and information here (select Tillhörande dokument och bilagor): www.socialstyrelsen.se/statistik-och-data/statistik/alla-statistikamnen/lakemedel (in Swedish, but with English list of terms).

If you want to use our statistical database:

www.socialstyrelsen.se/en/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistical-databases

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