



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Report, Final 2020 OD Numbers Provide Picture of County Opioid Problem *County Continues to Coordinate Approach to Addiction*

PITTSBURGH – Continuing its coordinated approach to the opioid problem in the county, the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner (ACOME) and the departments of Health and Human Services released reports related to the opioid issue, and announced additional grant funding to assist in response for residents with addictions.

Dr. Karl Williams, Chief Medical Examiner, reported today that the number of deaths from accidental overdoses during 2020 has been finalized. The 2020 number of 689 overdose deaths reflects an increase of 125 deaths over the final 2019 number of 564, a 22% increase.

“The epidemic of drug overdoses continues with a steady rise towards the peak year of 2017 when the widespread availability of Narcan resulted in a significant decline,” said Williams. “A particularly troubling trend is the increasing appearance of methamphetamine and newer synthetic analogues of fentanyl and the benzodiazepine group of agents.”

The data from the 2020 deaths indicates that more males died of drug-related overdoses (68%) with 75% of decedents having been identified as white. Nearly 43% of cases (294 deaths) fall into one of three age groups: 35-39, 30-34, and 40-44. The ages from 25 to 54 account for 74% of the deaths with white males the largest group.

The most frequent drug in the typical mixture of agents remains fentanyl, with heroin and cocaine the second and third most common, being found in 91% of the cases. The three zip codes with the most overdose deaths in the county: 15210, 15212 and 15136. In 2020, 51% of all accidental deaths were drug deaths. Drug deaths also made up 27% of all morgue and issue cases during the year.

Further details on the overdose deaths in the county for 2020, and prior years, can be found on the OverdoseFreePA website: <https://www.overdosefreepa.pitt.edu>.

The departments of Health and Human Services recently released a report [Accidental Overdose Deaths in Allegheny County, January 2016 – June 2020](#), which provides another tool to understand where deaths are occurring and to target prevention and treatment measures. Key findings of the report included:

- Recent trends: 2016 and 2017 had the two highest numbers of yearly accidental overdose deaths that the county has seen; following those peaks, overdose deaths decreased by 41% from 2017 to 2018. Overdose deaths then increased by 16% from 2018 to 2019 and while 2020 numbers were still preliminary when the report was drafted, there were 311 total deaths in the first and second quarter of 2020, which is a 44% increase compared to the same time period in the previous year.
- Race: Black residents experienced a disproportionately high rate of accidental overdose deaths from the third quarter of 2018 through the second quarter of 2020. The rate of overdose deaths from the third quarter of 2019 through the second quarter of 2020 was more than two times greater than that of white residents.
- Substance types: Opioids, usually in combination with other drugs, were involved in 87% of accidental overdose deaths in 2019. Fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid, was present in 77%

of cases. Since 2018, the percentage of deaths involving a combination of heroin and fentanyl has decreased, while the percentage of deaths involving fentanyl in combination with cocaine and methamphetamines has increased.

- Individuals' involvement with other systems prior to death: Approximately half of the individuals who died of an overdose received publicly funded mental health treatment or substance use disorder treatment during the year prior to their death. Thirty percent had involvement with adult probation and 19% were booked in the Allegheny County Jail at some point in the year prior to death.

"We're disheartened to see an increase in opioid overdose deaths last year," said Erin Dalton, Director of Human Services. "Especially concerning is the disproportionately high rate of overdose deaths in our Black community and the continued effects of fentanyl on our region. The impact of the pandemic on social isolation and ability to seek and provide safe treatment can be felt in these latest data."

In addition to the release of the report, the county has revised its [Overdose Dashboard](#) to allow users to explore information about people who have experienced an accidental overdose within the county. The death data comes from ACOME and is updated every two weeks. Additional overdose data comes from Emergency Departments through EpiCenter, and from EMS agencies through EMS West. It is updated monthly and may contain overlap data, or data also included by ACOME.

Surveillance efforts to date have helped identify target populations and regions of the county and naloxone is proving effective at reducing death. Since 2015, the Health Department has distributed 32,301 naloxone kits and held 253 trainings that equipped 10,585 people in the county to administer naloxone if needed. Overdose trends monitored by the Health Department since 2016 have shown that naloxone administered by EMS and suspected opioid emergency department visits began to increase again in August of 2019.

In response, the Health Department has created an Overdose Data to Action Program, part of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Overdose Data to Action Program. The effort is intended to address opioid overdoses in the county through expansion of existing surveillance efforts, expansion of prevention efforts, improvement of linkages to care, building of new diversion programs, and the launch of a harm reduction communications campaign. The program was awarded funding from the CDC in 2019 and will receive \$5.2 million a year for three years to support its efforts.

The Health Department's Overdose Prevention Program has been selected as an awardee for *Comprehensive Community Approaches that Address Childhood Trauma to Prevent Substance Misuse*, a project of the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO). The \$403,000 grant award will allow for the expansion of the county's [Hello Baby](#) program services to better support new parents and families facing substance misuse by enhancing care coordination of harm reduction, treatment, and recovery support services.

"Although early childhood is often portrayed as a magical time for families, in reality, for many, it is a time of significant stress," said Dr. Debra Bogen, Director of the Health Department. "I am pleased that this grant will augment the work ongoing in the county to support families with young children. Specifically, this funding will support identification of and provide evidence-based services to families impacted by substance misuse to reduce adverse childhood experiences that children and families experience."

Those seeking support or help with issues related to Substance Use Disorder for themselves or others, can call either of these 24/7/365 resources:

PA Get Help
1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Pathway to Care & Recovery
412-325-7550

For those who prefer to seek assistance in-person, walk-in services are available 24/7/365 at Pathway to Care & Recovery located at 326 Third Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

Additional Harm Reduction services are available through [Prevention Point Pittsburgh](#).

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