



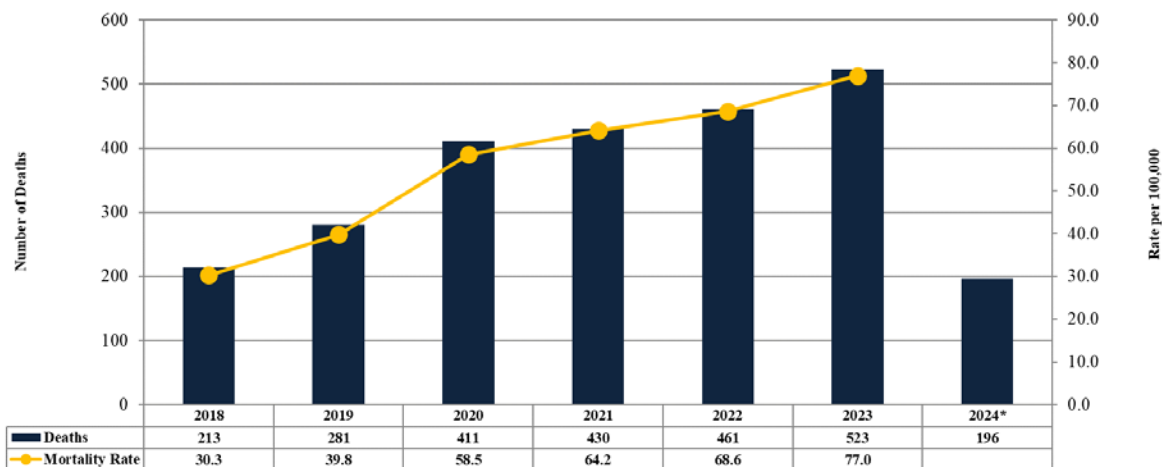
Opioid-Related Fatalities: January 1, 2018 to June 30, 2024
 Report Date: September 19, 2024

The DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated a total of 2,515¹ deaths involving the use of opioids from January 1, 2018 through June 30, 2024. This report examines the presence of opioids (heroin, fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, morphine, prescription opioids and the general category of opiates) in deaths observed at the OCME.

Trends in Deaths due to Opioid Use

Similarly, to the rest of the country, the number of fatal opioid-related deaths continue to rise at an alarming rate (Fig.1(a)). On average, there were 17 opioid-related fatalities per month in 2018 and 23 opioid-related fatalities per month in 2019. This rate increased to 38 deaths per month in 2022 and 43 deaths per month in 2023. Currently in 2024, 196 opioid-related fatalities have been certified by OCME.

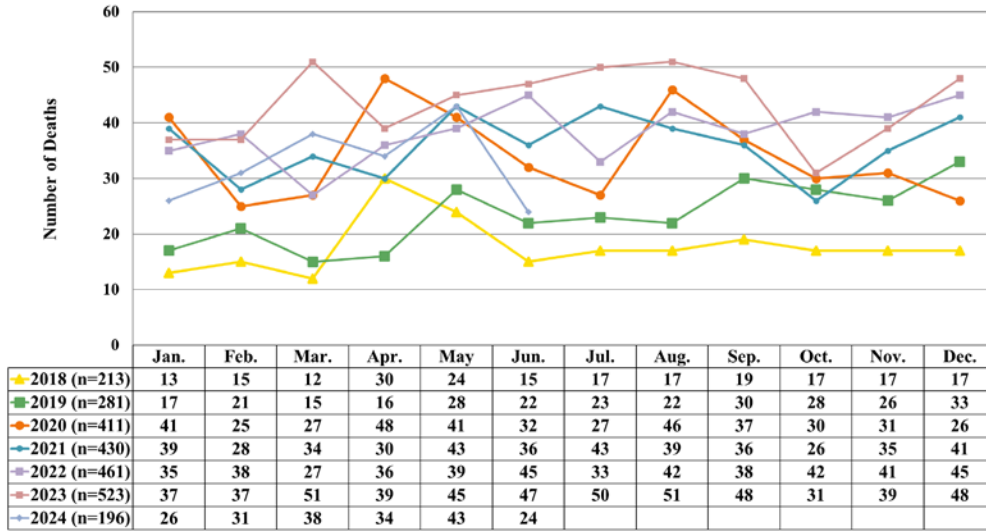
Fig. 1(a): Number and Mortality Rate of Opioid-Related Fatalities in DC by Year: 2018-2024



*The mortality rate for 2024 is unavailable due to pending Census ACS population estimates.

¹ The data presented in this report includes 23 cases with deaths due to opioid drug use where the Manner of Death was not "Accident": 2 cases in 2018, 3 cases in 2019, 6 cases in 2021, 4 cases in 2022, 7 in 2023, and 3 cases in 2024.

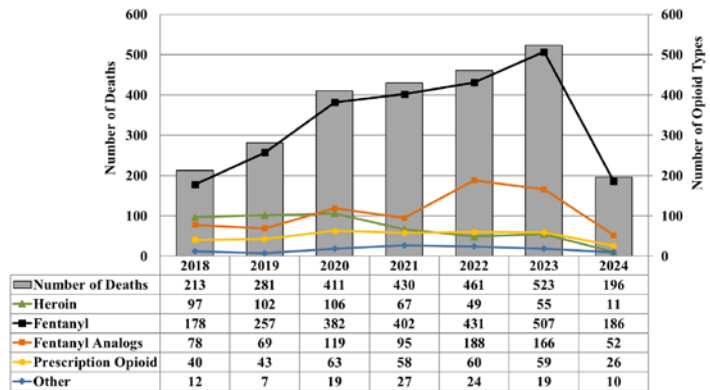
Fig. 1(b): Number of Opioid-Related Fatalities by Month and Year (N=2515)



Incidence of Opioids by Year

Figure 2 displays the illicit and prescription opioids identified through toxicology testing of the decedents from 2018 through June 30, 2024. In the past, heroin was the most prevalent opioid, however, beginning in 2017, the most prevalent opioid detected in postmortem screening was fentanyl. This continues to be true. The most prevalent fentanyl analogs identified are fluorofentanyl, p-fluoroisbutyryl fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl (4-ANPP).

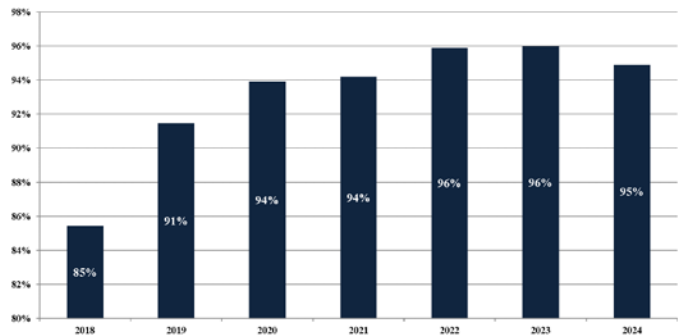
Fig. 2: Distribution of Opioid Types Contributing to Opioid-Related Fatalities (All Opioids)



Increase in Fentanyl/Fentanyl Analogs in Opioid-Related Fatalities

Figure 3 highlights the increasing percentage of cases containing fentanyl or fentanyl analogs. In 2018, 85% of cases involved fentanyl or fentanyl analog with a noticeable increase between 2018 and 2019. More than half of the cases contain fentanyl and throughout the years, these numbers continue to rise.

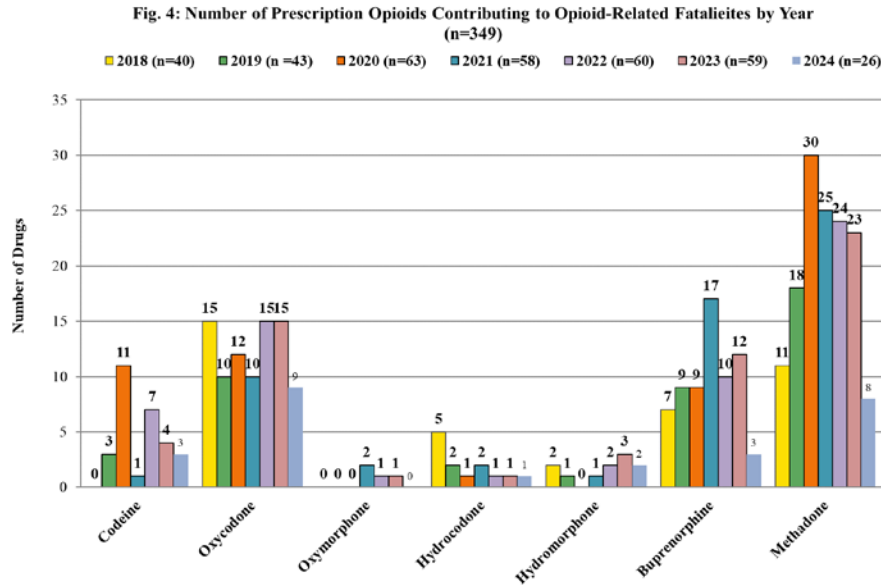
Figure 3: Percent of Opioid-Related Fatalities Involving Fentanyl 2018-2024



Polysubstance

Prescription Opioids

There were 349 prescription opioids found in opioid-related fatalities from 2018 through June 30, 2024 (Fig. 4). The number of prescription opioids identified in opioid-related deaths decreased significantly in 2018 (n=40). However, the number of prescription opioids identified in opioid-related deaths increased to 63 in 2020. Figure 4 illustrates that methadone and oxycodone are currently the most prevalent prescription opioids identified.



Emerging Drug Misuse and Mixed Use - Xylazine

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration², U.S. Food and Drug Administration³, and The White House⁴ have issued public health safety alerts regarding increased trafficking and lethality of xylazine mixed with fentanyl and other illicit drugs. Since 2020, OCME has observed an increasing presence of xylazine in opioid-related deaths (Table 1).

| Year | # of Deaths |
|------|-------------|
| 2020 | 3 |
| 2021 | 6 |
| 2022 | 11 |
| 2023 | 15 |
| 2024 | 9 |

² <https://www.dea.gov/alert/dea-reports-widespread-threat-fentanyl-mixed-xylazine>

³ <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-alerts-health-care-professionals-risks-patients-exposed-xylazine-illicit-drugs>

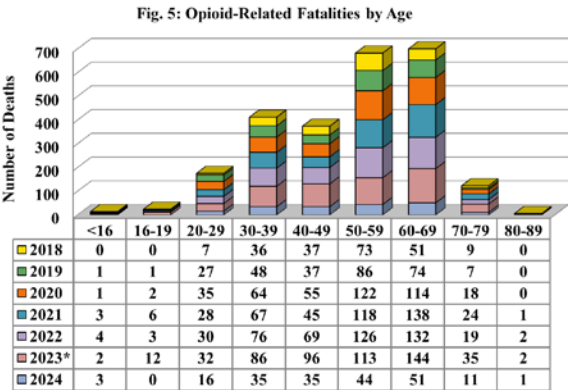
⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/04/12/biden-harris-administration-designates-fentanyl-combined-with-xylazine-as-an-emerging-threat-to-the-united-states/>

| | |
|--------------|-----------|
| Total | 44 |
|--------------|-----------|

Demographics

Age

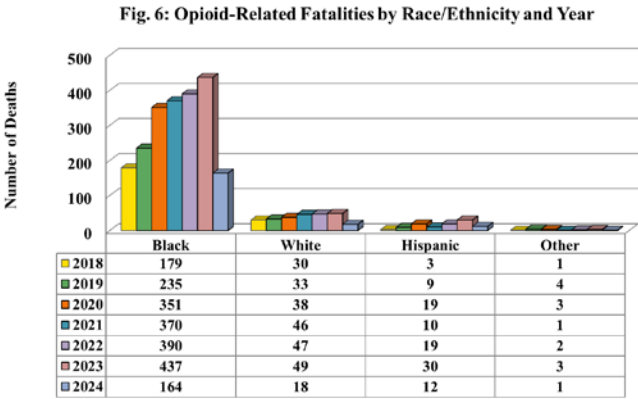
Approximately 70% of all opioid-related deaths occurred among adults between the ages of 40-69 years old (Fig. 5). 55% of opioid-related deaths occurred among people ages 50 to 69.



*1 fetal death not included in any age range

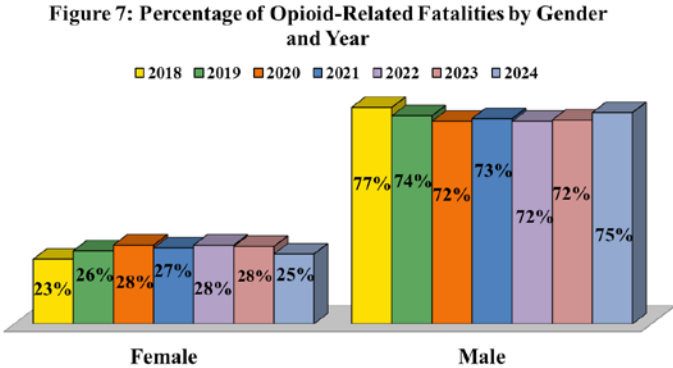
Race/Ethnicity

Overall, 2,126 or 84% of all opioid-related deaths were among Blacks (Fig. 6). This trend remains consistent over the years.



Gender⁵

Opioid-related fatalities were more common among males (Fig. 7).



⁵The data presented in this report includes 2 transgender female deaths; 1 case in 2022 and 1 case in 2023.

Jurisdiction of Residence

The majority of the decedents were residents of DC (Fig.8). From 2018 to June 30, 2024 opioid-related deaths were most prevalent amongst DC residents of Wards 5, 7 & 8 (n=1,086) (Fig.9). However, there are variations across years.

Fig. 8: Number of Opioid-Related Fatalities by Jurisdiction of Residence and Year

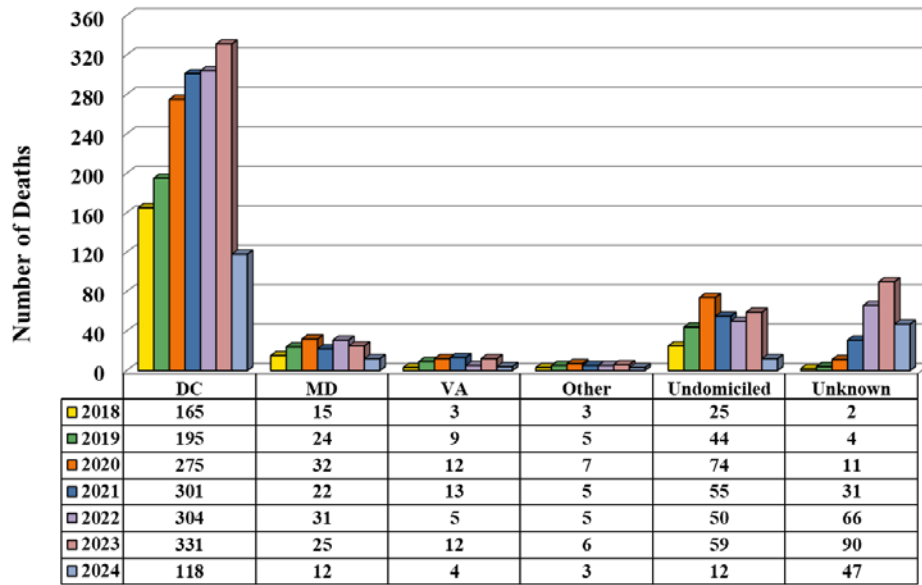


Fig. 9: Number of Opioid-Related Fatalities by Ward of Residence and Year

