



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
401 E Street, SW – 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20024



Opioid-related Fatal Overdoses: January 1, 2016 to August 31, 2020

Report Date: November 20, 2020

The DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated a total of **1290¹** deaths due to the use of opioids from January 1, 2016 through August 31, 2020. 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

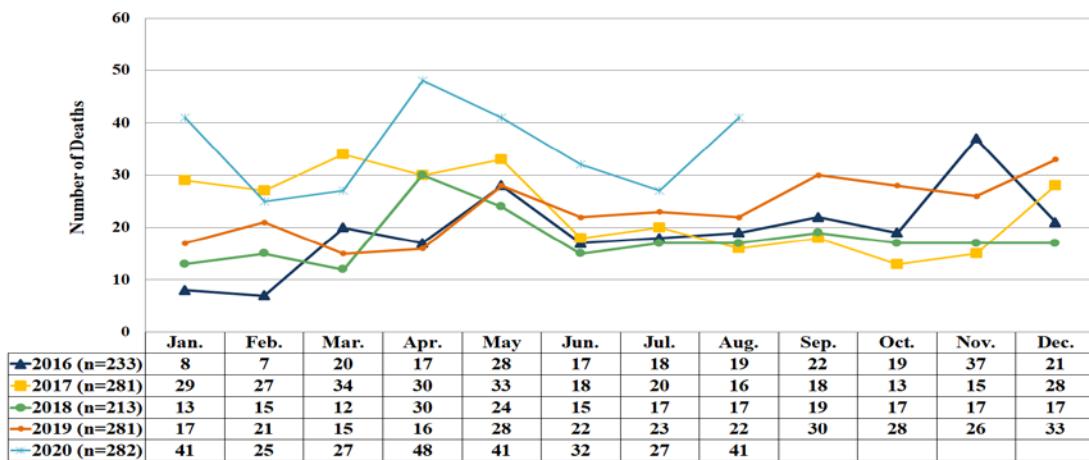
Similarly to the rest of the country, the number of fatal opioid overdoses in the District increased between 2014 and 2017 (Fig. 1(a)). Despite observing a decrease in fatal opioid overdoses in 2018, the number of opioid overdoses increased by 32% (n=281) in 2019. On average, there were 17 opioid overdoses per month in 2018. However, the average number of opioid overdoses in 2019 has returned to the average level in 2017 (n=23).

There has been a total of 282 opioid overdoses in 2020 year to date.

Fig. 1(a) Number and Rate of OCME Cases by Year,
2014-2019



Fig. 1(b): Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Month and Year (N=1290)



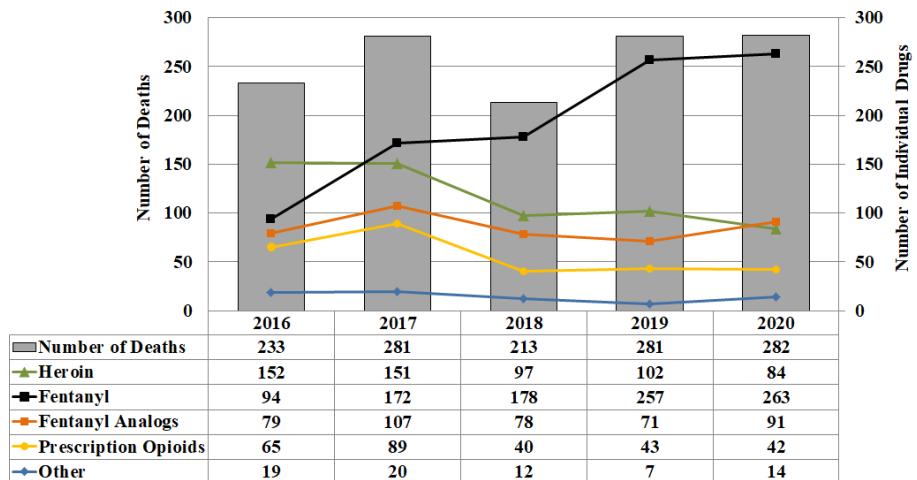
¹ The data presented in this report includes 19 cases with deaths due to opioid drug use where the Manner of Death was not "Accident": 5 cases in 2014, 2 cases in 2015, 4 cases in 2016, 5 cases in 2017, 2 cases in 2018 and 3 cases in 2019.



**Fig. 2: Total Number of Opioid Drugs Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year
(All Opioids)**

Incidence of Opioids by Year

Figure 2 displays the illicit and prescription opioids identified through toxicology testing of the decedents from 2016 to August 31, 2020. In 2016, the most prevalent drug identified was heroin. However, beginning in 2017, the most prevalent drug identified is fentanyl. The most prevalent fentanyl analogs identified are furanyl fentanyl, p-fluoroisobutyryl fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl.



Increase in Fentanyl/Fentanyl Analogs in Opioid Overdoses

Figure 3 highlights the increasing percentage of cases containing fentanyl or fentanyl analogs. The percentage of cases containing fentanyl or a fentanyl analog has gradually increased since 2015. In 2016, **62%** of cases involved fentanyl or a fentanyl analog. The noticeable increase in the presence of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs began in March 2016, with over half of the cases containing fentanyl. In 2019, **91%** of the cases contained fentanyl or a fentanyl analog.

Prescription Opioids

There were **279** prescription opioids found in the opioid overdoses between January 2016 and August 31, 2020 (Fig. 4). The number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid overdoses had increased steadily between 2016 (n=65) and 2017 (n=89). However, the number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid deaths decreased to 43 in 2019. Figure 4 illustrates that methadone and oxycodone are currently the most prevalent prescription opioids identified.

Figure 3: Percent of Overdose Deaths Involving Fentanyl 2015-2020

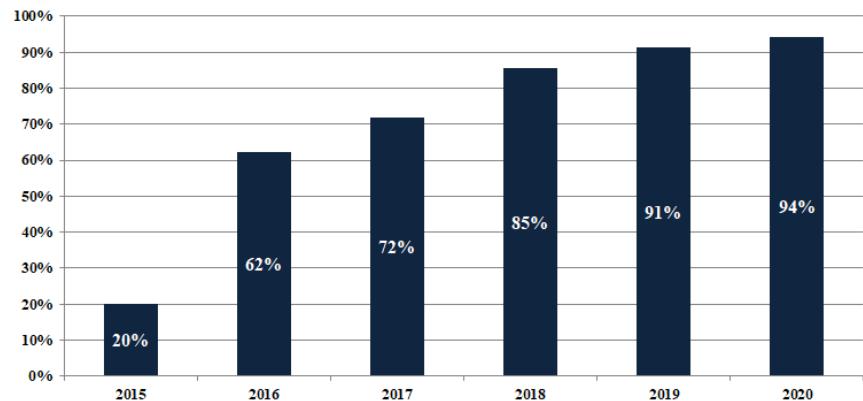
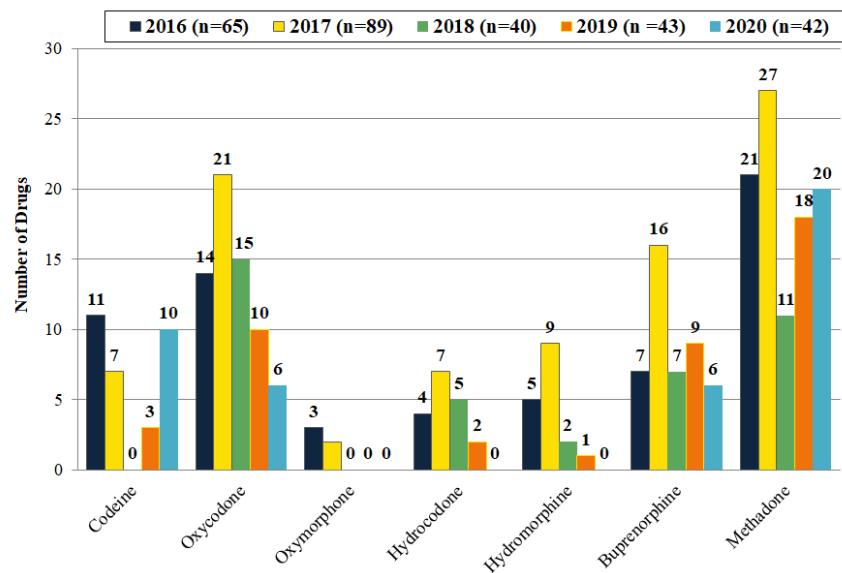


Fig. 4: Number of Prescription Opioids Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year (n=279)

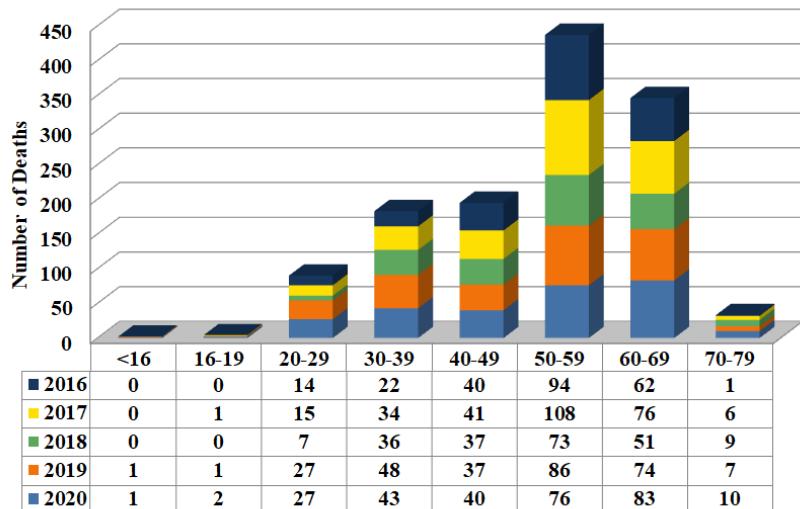


Demographics

Age

Approximately **76%** of all fatal opioid overdoses occur among adults between the ages of 40-69 years old (Fig. 5). Deaths due to opioid use were most prevalent among people ages 50 to 59 (n=35%).

Fig. 5: Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Age



Race/Ethnicity

Overall, **1088** or **84%** of all deaths due to opioid use were among Blacks (Fig. 6). This trend remains consistent across years.

Fig. 6: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Race/Ethnicity and Year

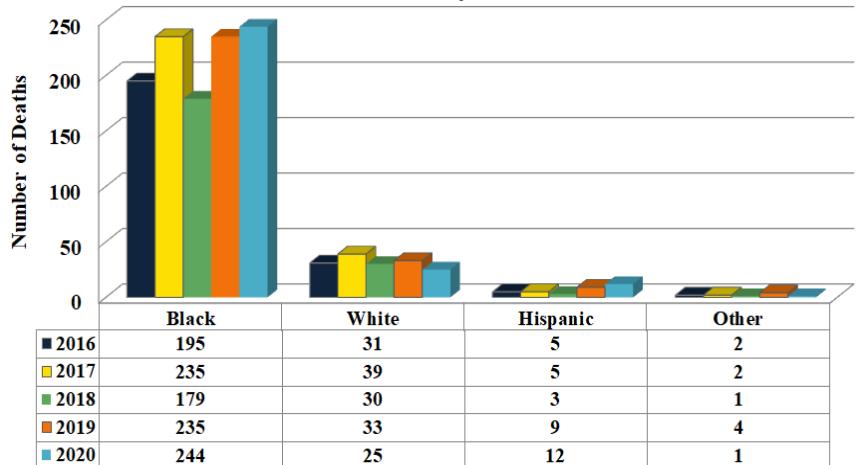
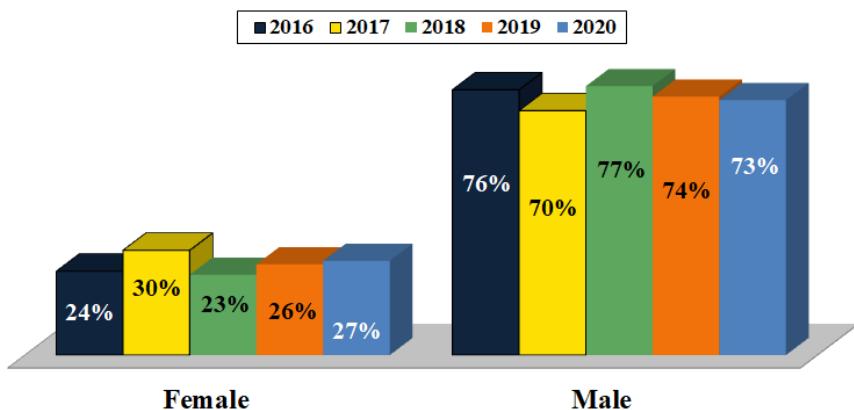


Figure 7: Percentage of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Gender and Year



Jurisdiction of Residence

The majority of the decedents were residents of DC (Fig.8). From 2016 to August 31, 2020, opioid-related fatal overdoses were most prevalent in **Wards 5, 7 & 8** (n=602) (Fig.9). However, there are variations across years.

Fig. 8: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Jurisdiction of Residence and Year

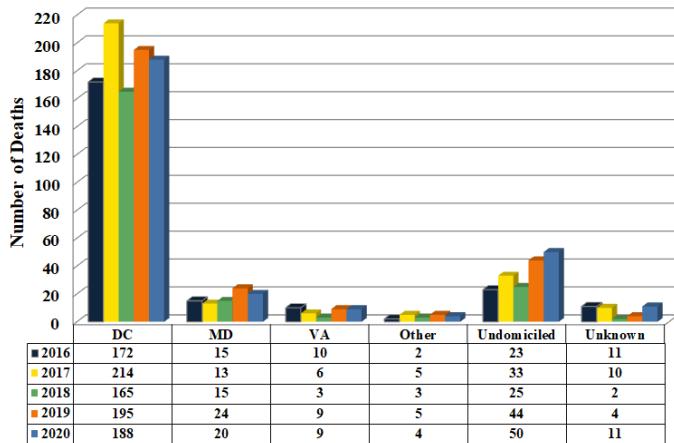


Fig. 9: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Ward of Residence and Year

