



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER**

401 E Street, SW – 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20024



**Opioid-related Fatal Overdoses: January 1, 2016 to February 29, 2020**

*Report Date: May 20, 2020*

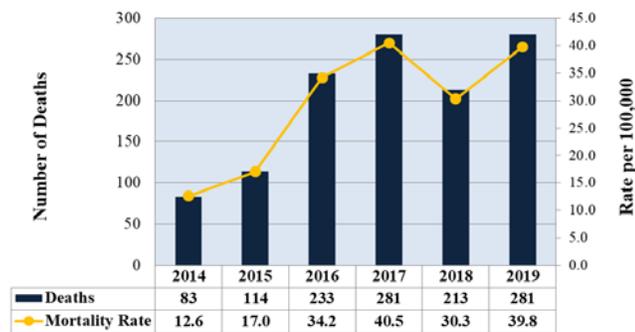
The DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated a total of **1071<sup>1</sup>** deaths due to the use of opioids from January 1, 2016 through February 29, 2020. This report examines the presence of opioids (*heroin, fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, morphine, prescription opioids and the general category of opiates*) in deaths observed at the OCME.

**Trends in Deaths due to Opioid Use**

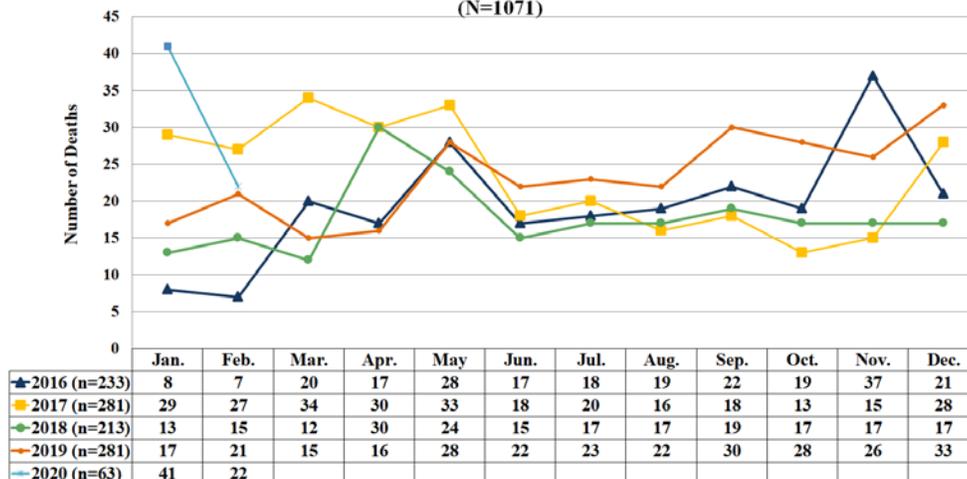
Similarly to the rest of the country, the number of fatal opioid overdoses in the District increased between 2014 and 2017 (Fig.1(a)). Despite observing a decrease in fatal opioid overdoses in 2018, the number of opioid overdoses increased by 32% (n=281) in 2019. On average, there were 17 opioid overdoses 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 63 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=1071)**



<sup>1</sup> 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.

### Suspected Overdoses by Week

Figure 2 shows the number of suspected overdoses from February 2020 to April 2020. The yellow dotted line depicts the first confirmed COVID-19 case in DC, which occurred on March 1st. There was a major peak in suspected overdoses during the week of April 19<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, the peak observed in suspected overdoses during the week of April 19<sup>th</sup> corresponds to the peak in deaths due to COVID-19.

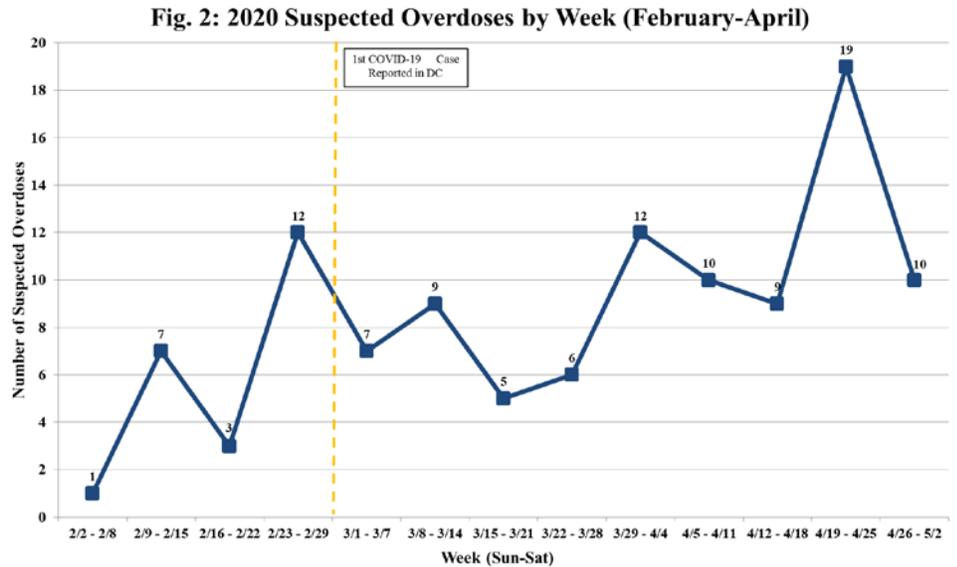


Fig. 2: 2020 Suspected Overdoses by Week (February-April)

### Incidence of Opioids by Year

Figure 3 displays the illicit and prescription opioids identified through toxicology testing of the decedents from 2014 to February 29, 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-fluoroisbutyryl fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl.

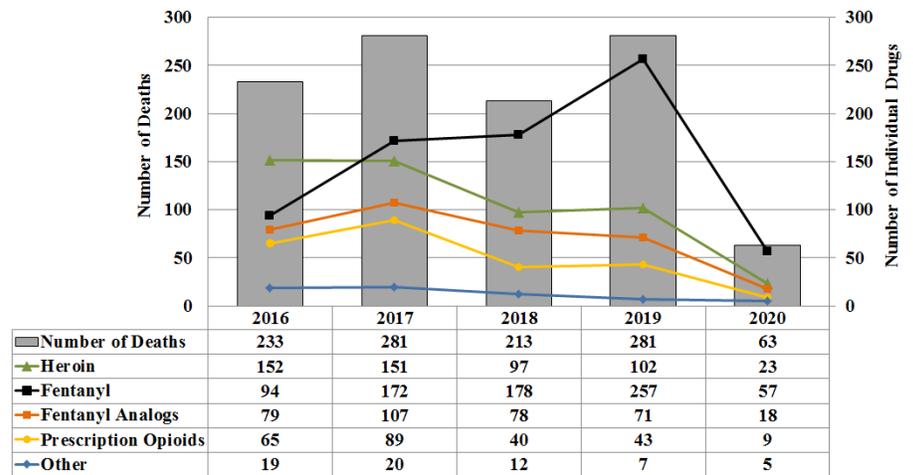
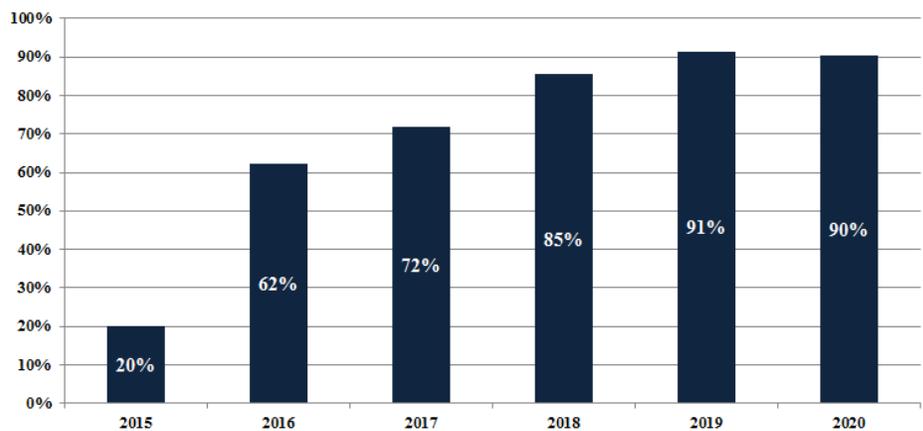


Figure 3: Total Number of Opioid Drugs Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year (All Opioids)

### Increase in Fentanyl/Fentanyl Analogs in Opioid Overdoses

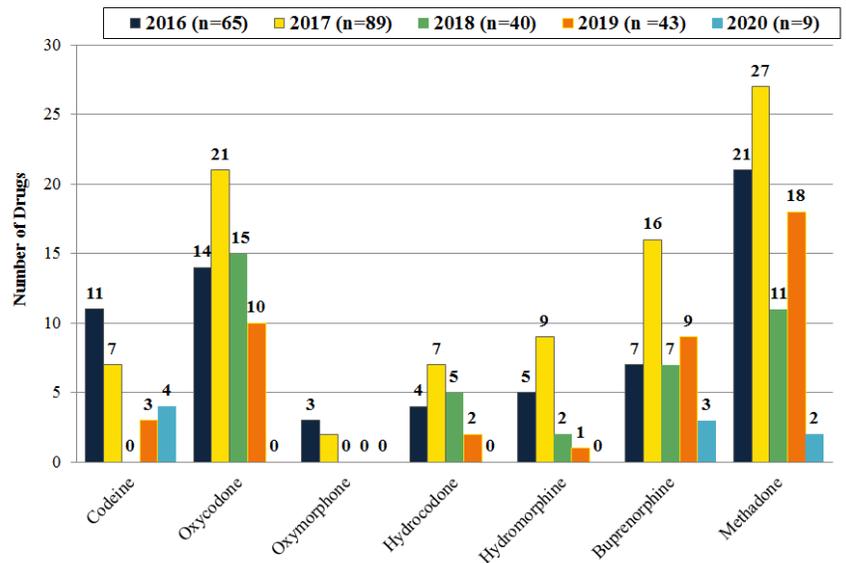
Figure 4 highlights the increasing percentage of cases containing fentanyl or fentanyl analogs. The percentage of cases containing fentanyl or a fentanyl analog has gradually increased since 2015. In 2016, 62% of cases involved fentanyl or a fentanyl analog. The noticeable increase in the presence of 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 **246** prescription opioids found in the opioid overdoses between January 2016 and February 29, 2020 (Fig. 5). 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 5 illustrates that methadone and oxycodone are currently the most prevalent prescription opioids identified.

Fig. 5: Number of Prescription Opioids Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year (n=246)



## Demographics

### Age

Approximately **77%** of all fatal opioid overdoses occur among adults between the ages of 40-69 years old (Fig. 6). Deaths due to opioid use were most prevalent among people ages 50 to 59 (n=36%).

Fig. 6: Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Age

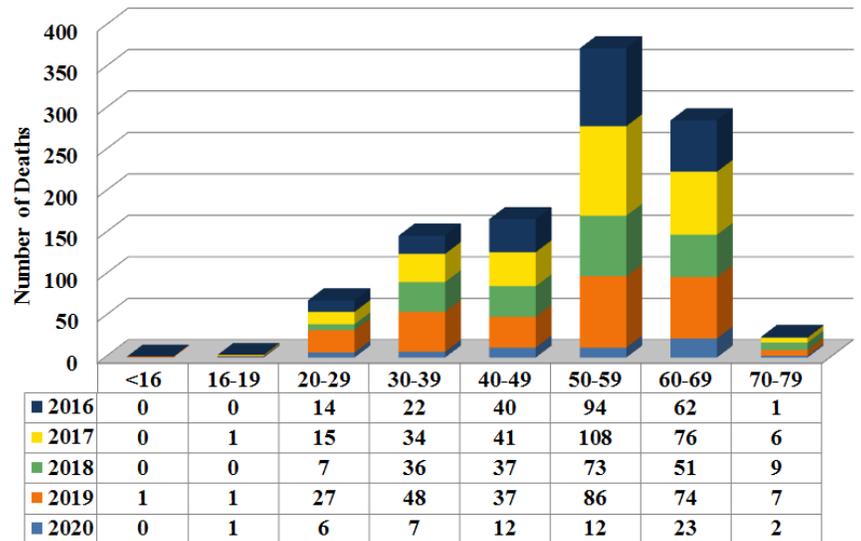
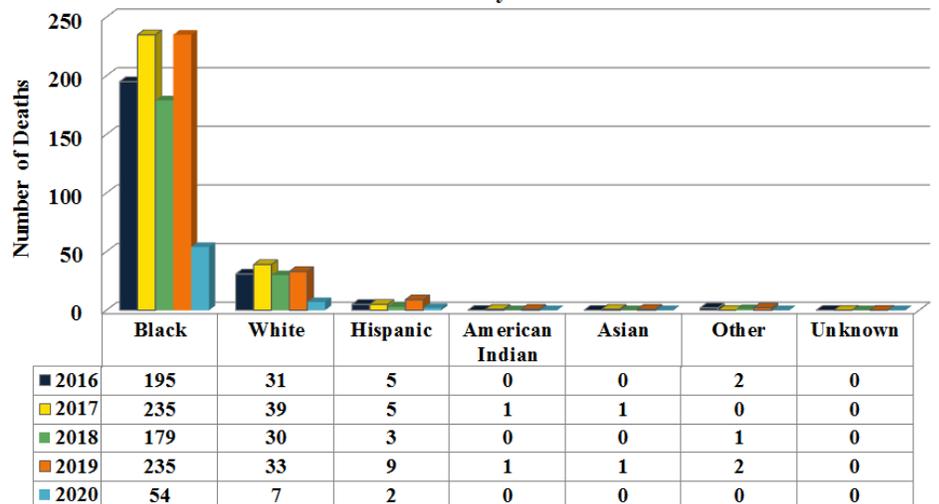


Fig. 7: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Race/Ethnicity and Year



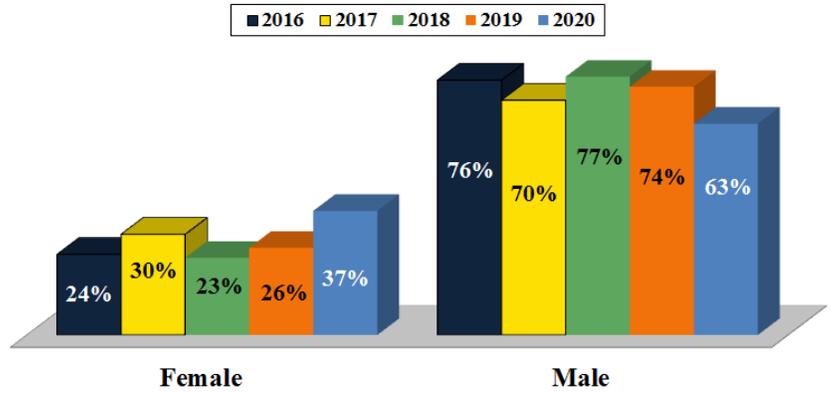
### Race/Ethnicity

Overall, **889** or **84%** of all deaths due to opioid use were among Blacks (Fig. 7). This trend remains consistent across years.

**Figure 8: Percentage of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Gender and Year**

Gender

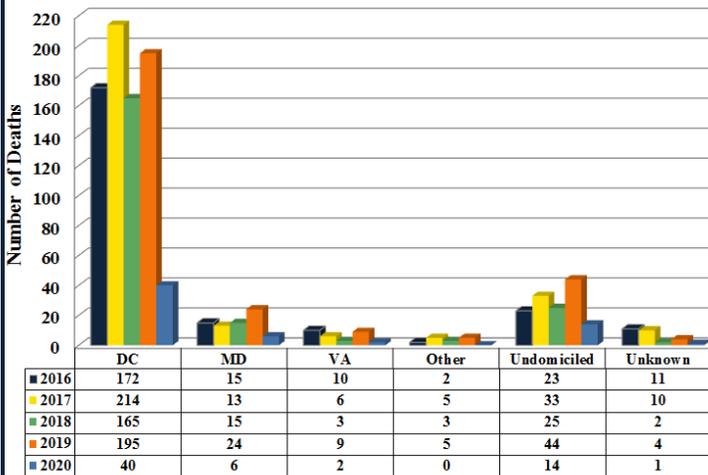
Fatal overdoses due to opioid drug use were more common among **males** (Fig. 8).



**Jurisdiction of Residence** Error! Bookmark not defined.

The majority of the decedents were residents of DC (Fig.9). From 2016 to February 29, 2020, opioid-related fatal overdoses were most prevalent in **Wards 5, 7 & 8** (n=509) (Fig.10). However, there are variations across years.

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



**Fig. 10: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Ward of Residence and Year**

