



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 January 31, 2021**

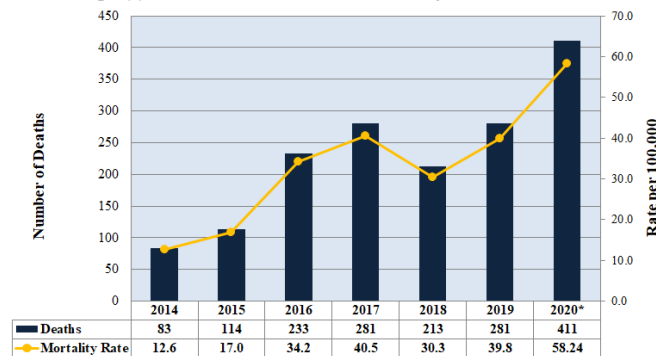
Report Date: April 20, 2021

The DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated a total of **1443<sup>1</sup>** deaths due to the use of opioids from January 1, 2016 through January 31, 2021. 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**

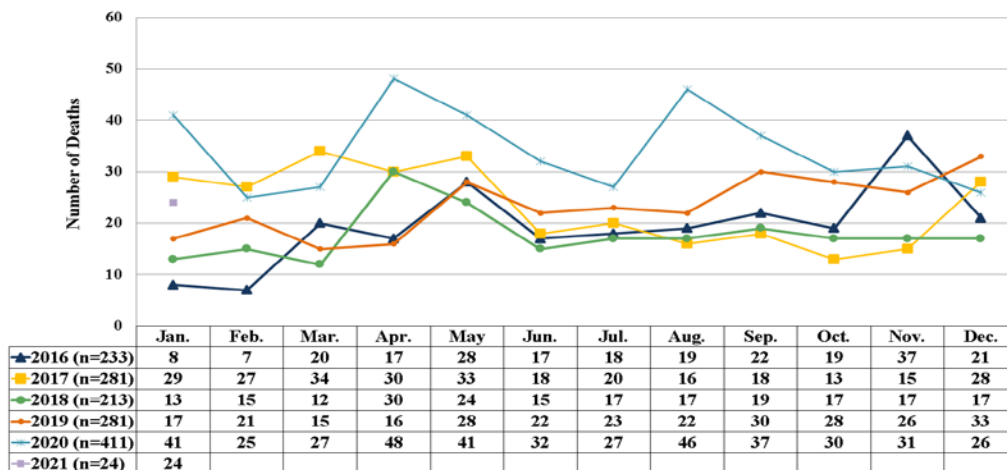
Similarly to the rest of the country, the number of fatal opioid overdoses in the District increased between 2014 and 2017 (Fig.1(a)). Despite observing a decrease in fatal opioid overdoses in 2018, the number of opioid overdoses increased by 32% (n=281) in 2019. On average, there were 17 opioid overdoses per month in 2018 and 23 opioid overdoses per month in 2019. This trend of increasing opioid overdoses continued into 2020, which saw an average of 34 opioid overdoses per month. **There has been a total of 24 opioid overdoses in 2021 year to date.**

Fig. 1(a) Number and Rate of OCME Cases by Year, 2014-2020



\*Due to the pending population size for 2020, 2019 data was used to calculate mortality rate: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/DC>

Fig. 1(b): Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Month and Year (N=1443)

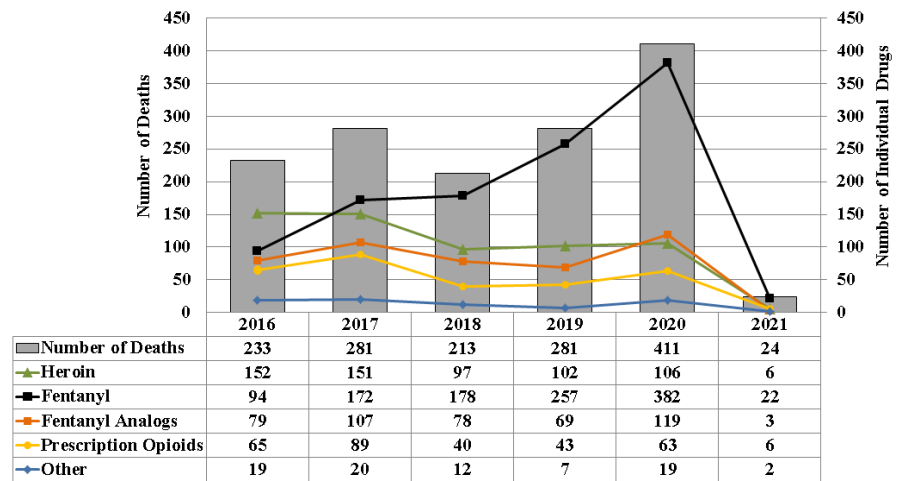


<sup>1</sup> The data presented in this report includes 19 cases with deaths due to opioid drug use where the Manner of Death was not “Accident”: 5 cases in 2014, 2 cases in 2015, 4 cases in 2016, 5 cases in 2017, 2 cases in 2018 and 3 cases in 2019.

## Incidence of Opioids by Year

Figure 2 displays the illicit and prescription opioids identified through toxicology testing of the decedents from 2016 to January 31, 2021. 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.

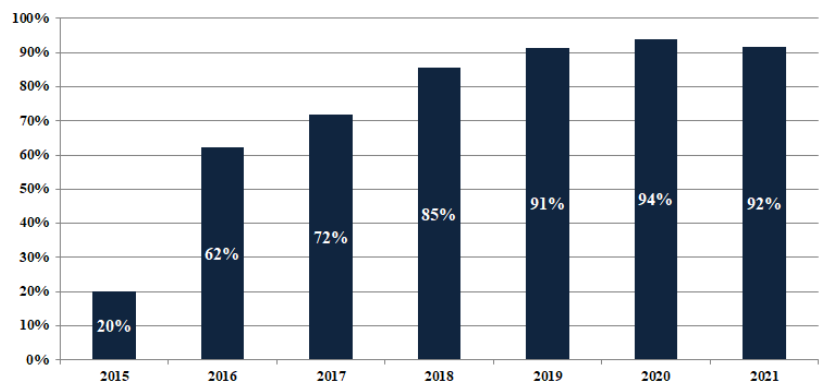
Fig. 2: Total Number of Opioid Drugs Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year (All Opioids)



## 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 2020, 94% of the cases contained fentanyl or a fentanyl analog.

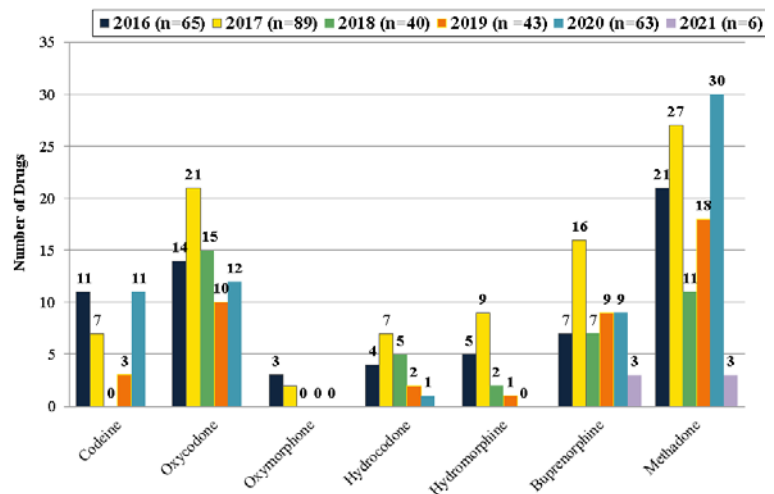
Figure 3: Percent of Overdose Deaths Involving Fentanyl 2015-2021



## Prescription Opioids

There were 306 prescription opioids found in the opioid overdoses between January 2016 and January 31, 2021 (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.

Fig. 4: Number of Prescription Opioids Contributing to Drug Overdoses by Year (n=306)

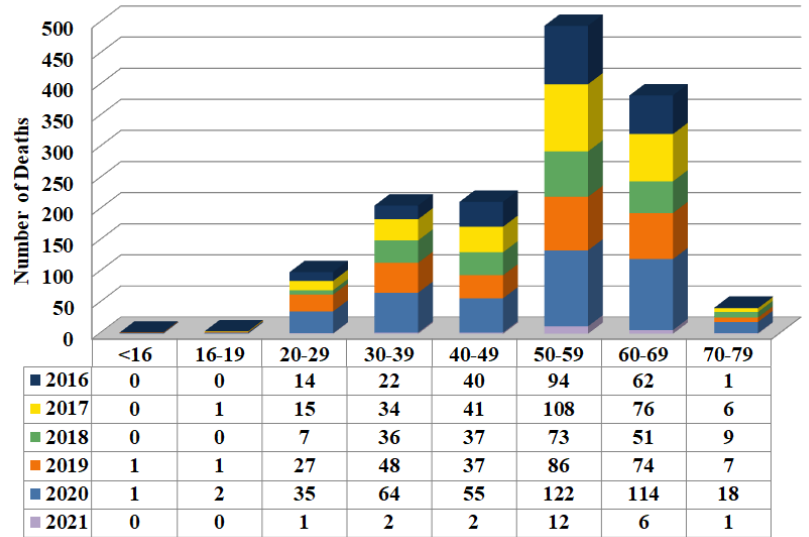


**Demographics**

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%).

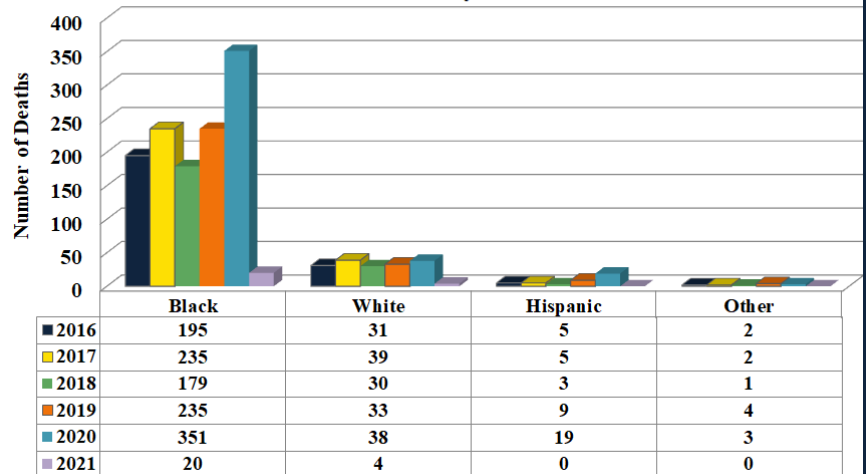
Fig. 5: Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Age



Race/Ethnicity

Overall, **1215** or **84%** of all deaths due to opioid use were among Blacks (Fig. 6). This trend remains consistent across years.

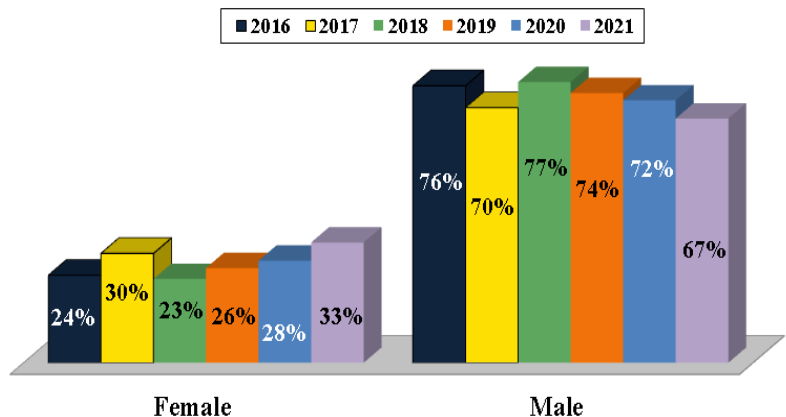
Fig. 6: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Race/Ethnicity and Year



Gender

Fatal overdoses due to opioid drug use were more common among **males** (Fig. 7).

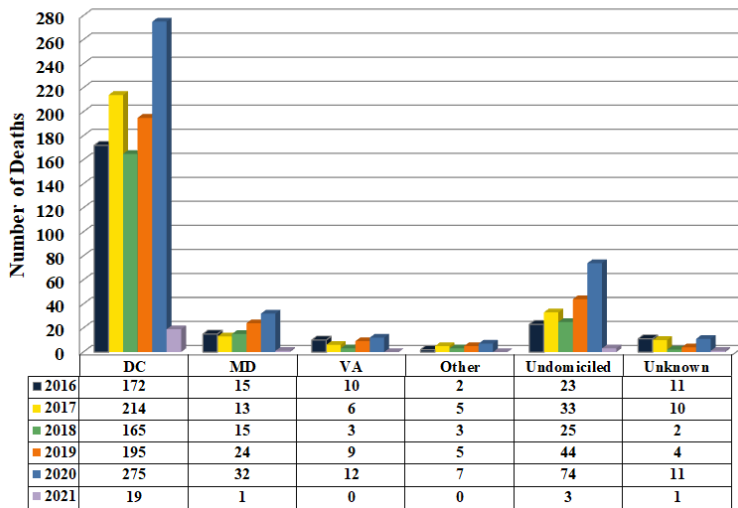
Figure 7: Percentage of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Gender and Year



## Jurisdiction of Residence

The majority of the decedents were residents of DC (Fig.8). From 2016 to January 31, 2021, opioid-related fatal overdoses were most prevalent in **Wards 5, 7 & 8** (n=669) (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**

