



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, 2018 to January 31, 2024

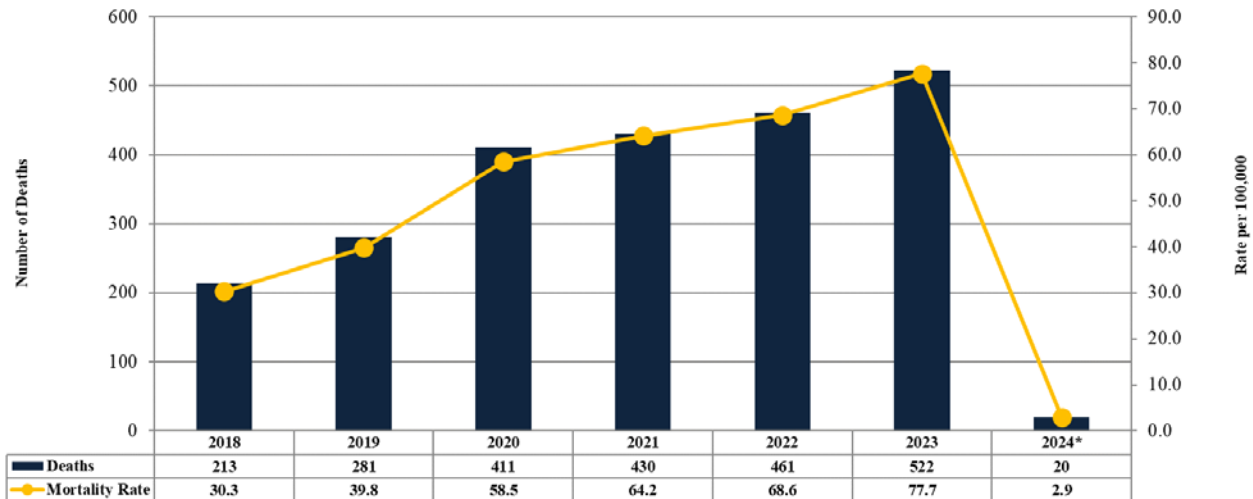
Report Date: April 17, 2024

The DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated a total of **2,338¹** deaths due to the use of opioids from January 1, 2018 through January 31, 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 overdoses continue to rise at an alarming rate (Fig.1(a)). On average, there were 17 fatal opioid overdoses per month in 2018 and 23 opioid overdoses per month in 2019. This rate increased to 38 deaths per month in 2022 and 43 deaths per month in 2023. **Currently in 2024, 20 opioid-related fatalities have been certified by OCME.**

Fig. 1(a): Number and Mortality Rate of Opioid-Related Fatal Overdoses in DC by Year: 2014-2023

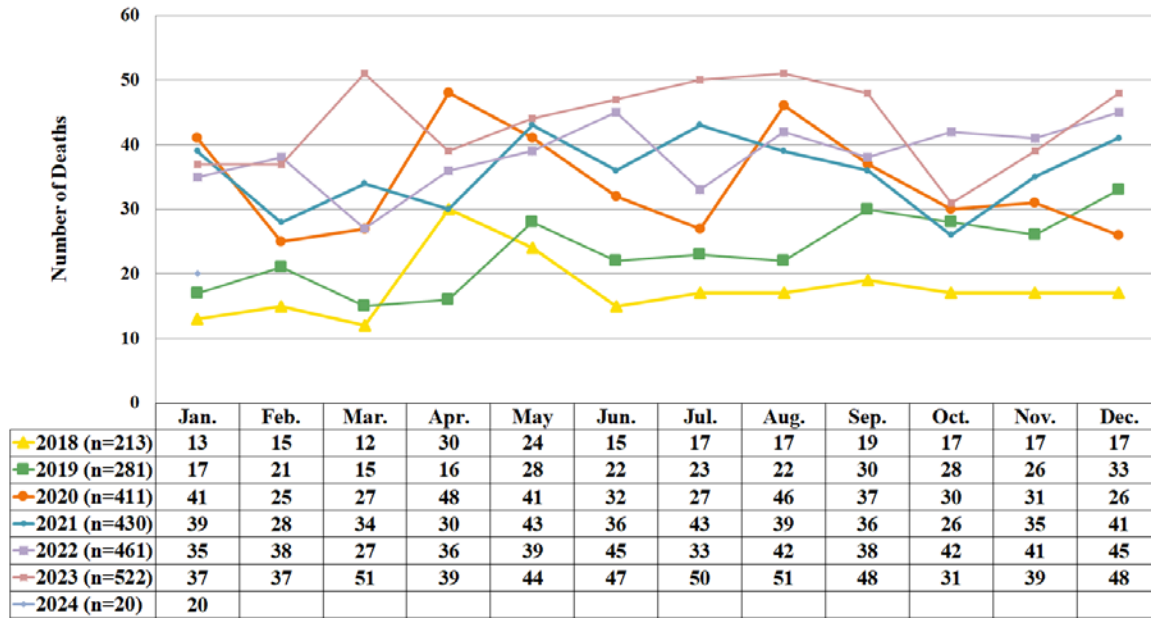


*The mortality rate for 2024 is provisional pending the final case closure and Census ACS population estimate.

¹ The data presented in this report includes 33 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, and 5 in 2023.



Fig. 1(b): Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Month and Year (N=2338)



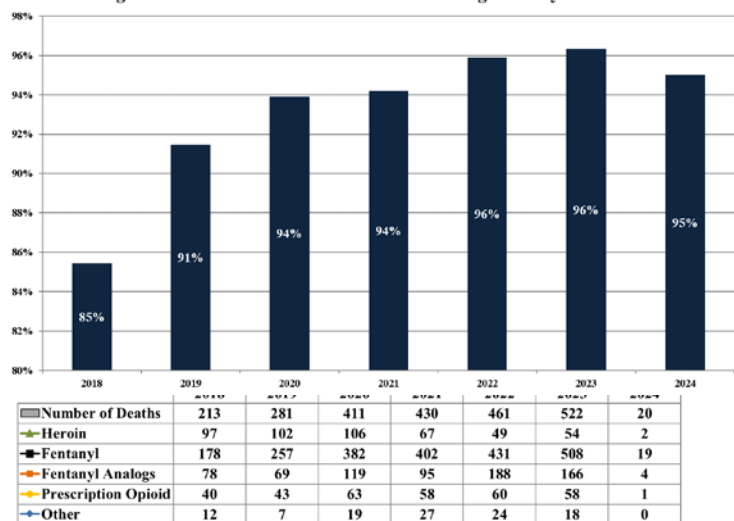
Incidence of Opioids by Year

Figure 2 displays the illicit and prescription opioids identified through toxicology testing of the decedents from 2018 through January 31, 2024. In the past, heroin was the most prevalent drug, however, beginning in 2017, the most prevalent drug identified was fentanyl and this continues to be true. The most prevalent fentanyl analogs identified are fluorofentanyl, p-fluoroisbutyryl fentanyl, acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl (4-ANPP).

Increase in Fentanyl/Fentanyl Analogs in Opioid Overdoses

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.

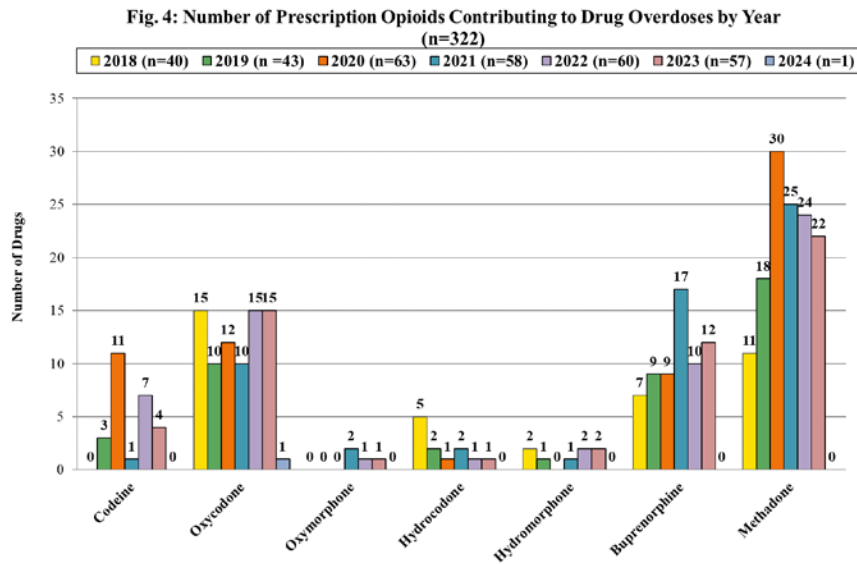
Figure 3: Percent of Overdose Deaths Involving Fentanyl 2018-2024



Polysubstance

Prescription Opioids

There were 322 prescription opioids found in opioid overdoses from 2018 through January 31, 2024 (Fig. 4). The number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid overdoses decreased significantly in 2018 (n=40). However, the number of prescription opioids identified in fatal opioid deaths increased to 63 in 2020. Figure 4 illustrates that as of 2023 data, methadone, oxycodone, and buprenorphine are the most prevalent prescription opioids identified among opioid-related fatalities at OCME.



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	16
2024	2
Total	38

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>

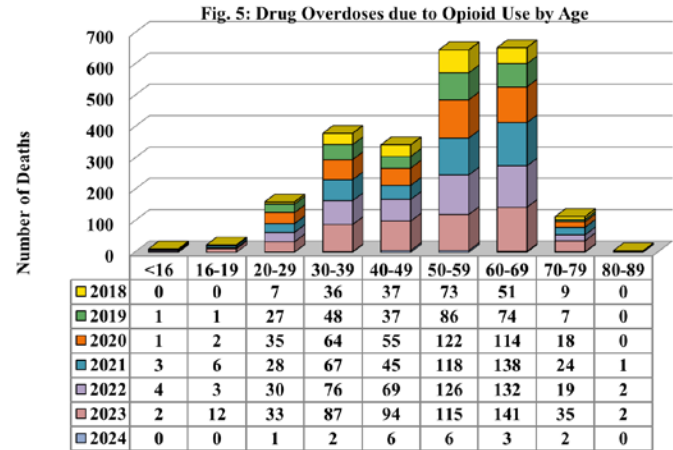
⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/04/12/biden-harris-administration-designates-fentanyl-combined-with-xylazine-as-an-emerging-threat-to-the-united-states/>



Demographics

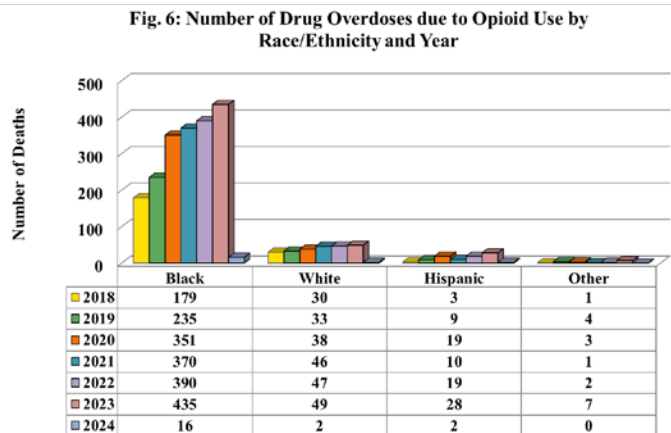
Age

Approximately **70%** of all fatal opioid overdoses occur among adults between the ages of 40-69 years old (Fig. 5). **56%** of deaths due to opioid use occurred among people ages 50 to 69.



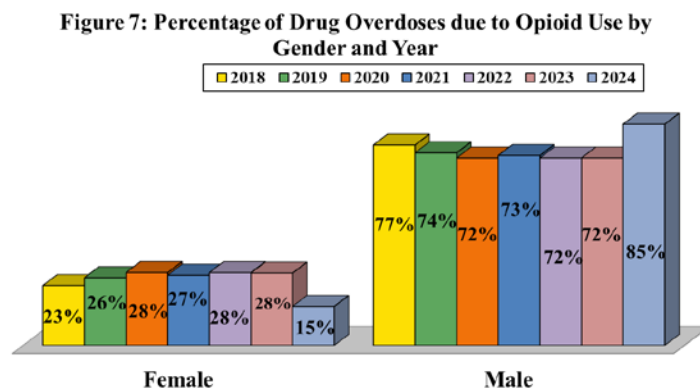
Race/Ethnicity

Overall, **1,976** or **84%** of all deaths due to opioid use were among Blacks (Fig. 6). This trend remains consistent over the years.



Gender⁵

Fatal overdoses due to opioid drug use 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 January 31, 2024 overdoses were most prevalent amongst DC residents of **Wards 5, 7 & 8** (n=1,020) (Fig.9). However, there are variations across years.

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

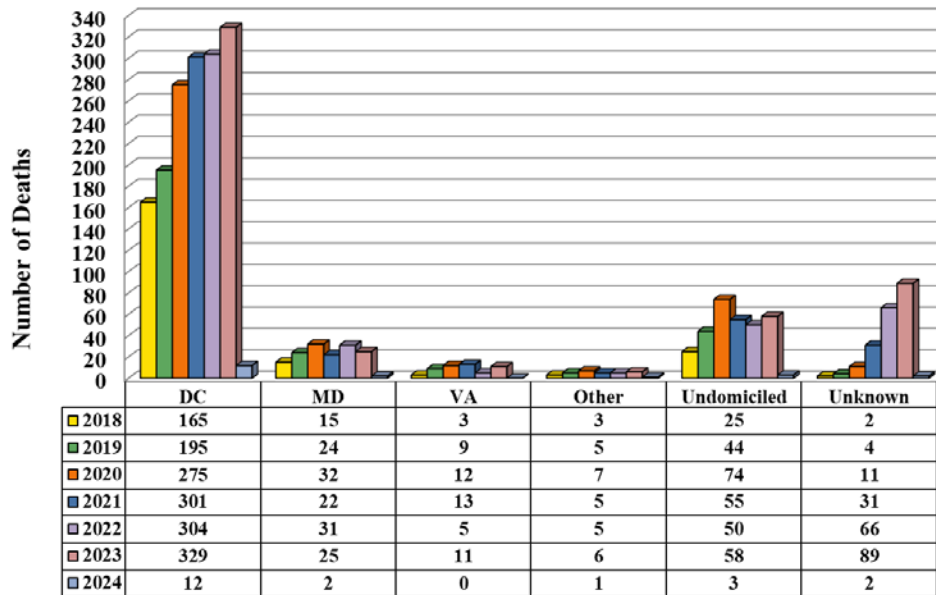


Fig. 9: Number of Drug Overdoses due to Opioid Use by Ward of Residence and Year

