




MEMORANDUM

Date: June 9, 2021

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry 
County Administrator

Re: **Drug Overdose Death Public Health Emergency**

Periodically I have updated the Board on the ongoing issues surrounding opioid overdose related deaths. Attached is a quarterly surveillance report that I have asked be prepared to provide more details about drug overdose deaths occurring in Pima County. The report also provides additional information regarding comparative overdose deaths of previous years, locations of deaths and the Pima County social vulnerability index of the location of death.

The rapid rise of drug overdose deaths, particularly those related to Fentanyl, is of significant concern. I have asked Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Francisco Garcia and our Public Health Department Director Dr. Theresa Cullen to continue to develop and refine an appropriate public health response to the accelerating number of opioid related deaths in Pima County with the goal of capitalizing on funding opportunities that may become available in the near future.

CHH/anc

Attachment

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,
Health and Community Services
Terry Cullen, MD, MS, Public Health Director, Pima County Health Department

Pima County Monthly Surveillance Report 2021 Fatal Overdoses

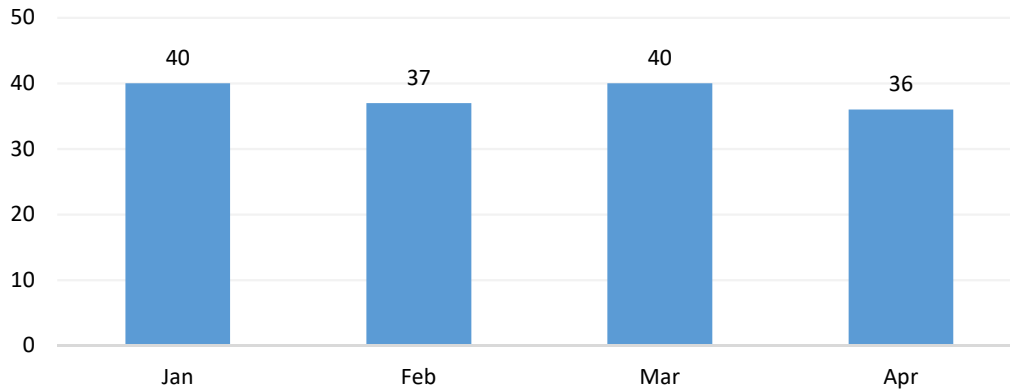
Review Period: January through April

Purpose: The Health Department's Community Mental Health and Addiction unit conducts routine surveillance of local drug overdose trends. Surveillance looks at specific data sets to monitor and record trends in critical public health indicators commonly associated with substance use and drug overdoses. The primary focus is to identify significant risk factors and intervention points to mitigate the impact of fatal and non-fatal overdoses.

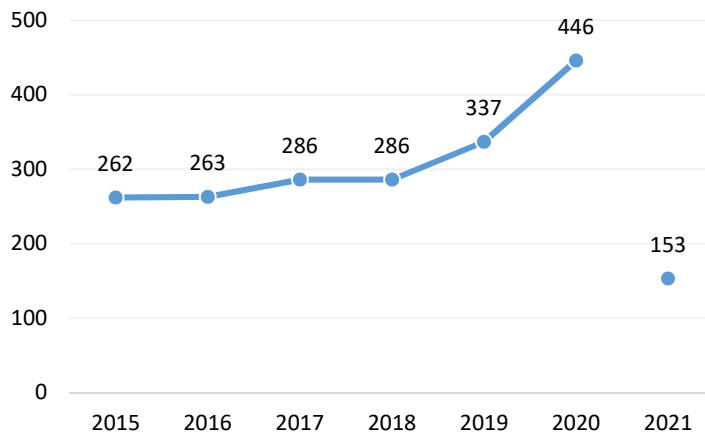
Limitations: There is an inherent data lag in the death certification process and the required time to complete the medical examination. Given these two factors, this report is limited to information available at the time the report was completed. Additional trends and statistics will be included in subsequent monthly reports.

Source: Vital Records Death Certificate Data and Pima County's Office of the Medical Examiner.

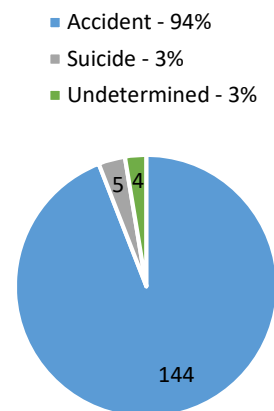
2021 Drug Overdose Deaths by Month
Total: 153



**Drug Overdose Deaths by Year
2015 - 2021 YTD**

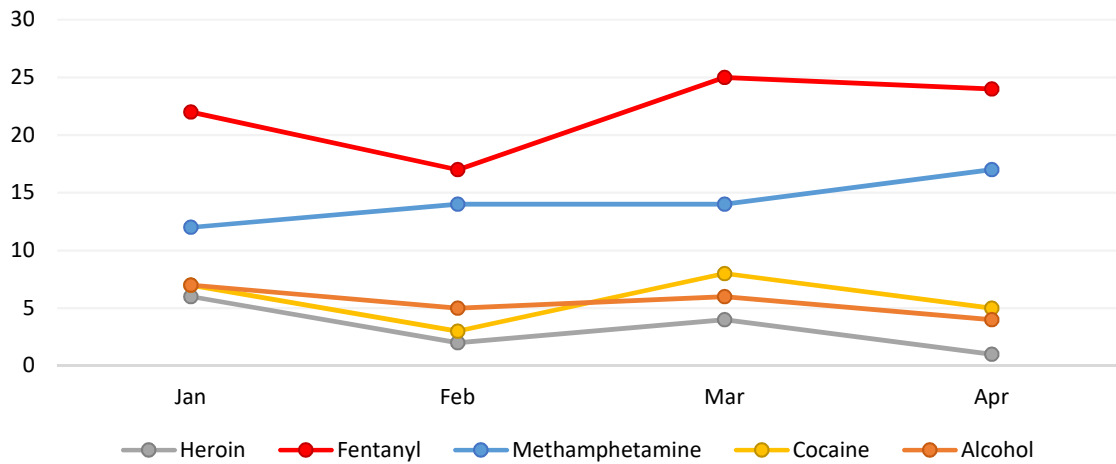


**2021 Drug Overdose Deaths by
Manner of Death**



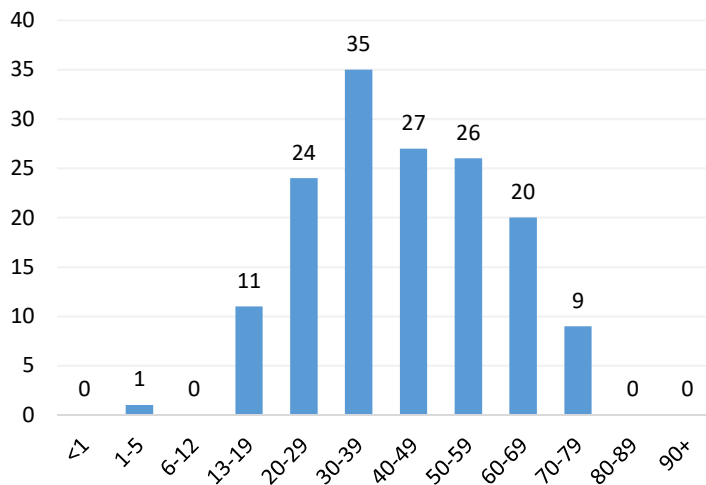
Drug data: In 2021, similar to last year, fentanyl and methamphetamine continue to contribute to the greatest number of overdose deaths. Fentanyl is attributed to 58% of overdose deaths so far this year and methamphetamine is attributed to 36% of overdose deaths. Combined, the two drugs have accounted for over 80% of all drug deaths.

Top 5 Drugs Contributing to Overdose Deaths by Month, 2021

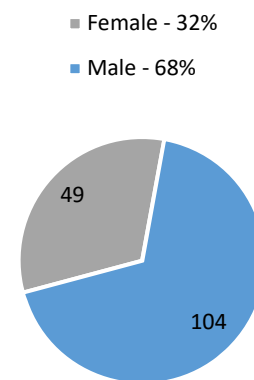


Demographics: Overdose deaths in 13-19 year olds and 60-69 year olds are increasing at a higher rate when compared to the same time period last year. Methamphetamine is the main contributor to overdose deaths in 60-69 year olds, and fentanyl is the sole contributor to overdose deaths in 0-19 year olds.

Decedents by Age Group, 2021



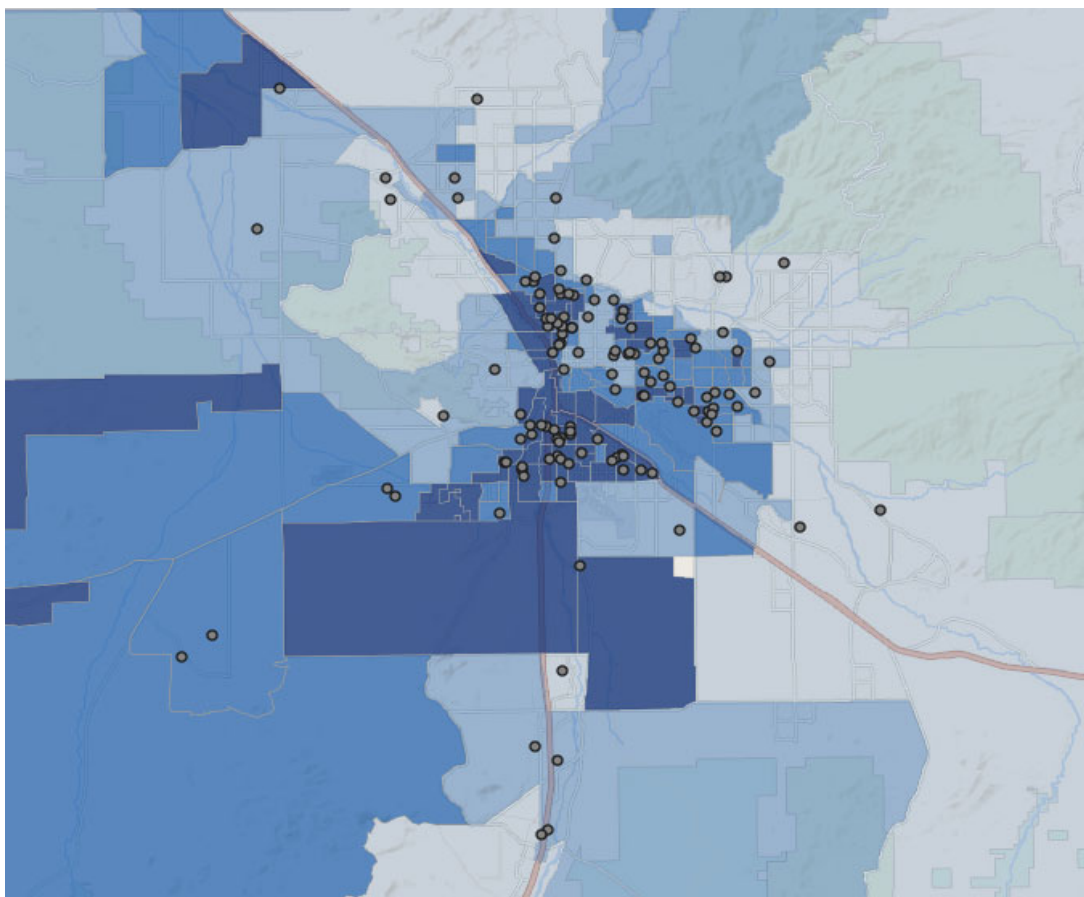
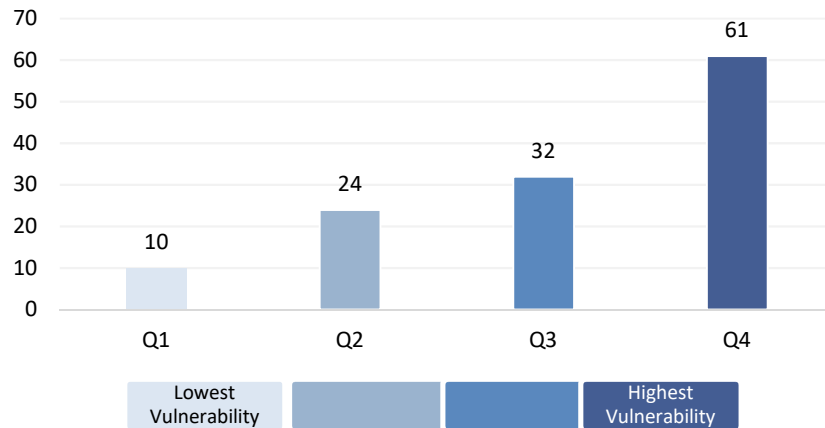
Decedents by Assigned Sex at Birth, 2021



Social Vulnerability Index (SVI): Based on the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index (CDC-SVI), a Pima County social vulnerability scale was created consisting of four categories defined by 25th, 50th, and 75th percentile of overall vulnerability scores for the county. Overdose deaths in Pima County are occurring disproportionately in communities with highest social vulnerability. The chart below illustrates the total number of fatalities from low SVI to high SVI, based on the residential address of the decedent.

**Note, there were 18 decedents with no known address and 8 with out of county or out of state addresses. Those 26 cases are not factored in to the aggregate below.*

Decedent's Residence by SVI



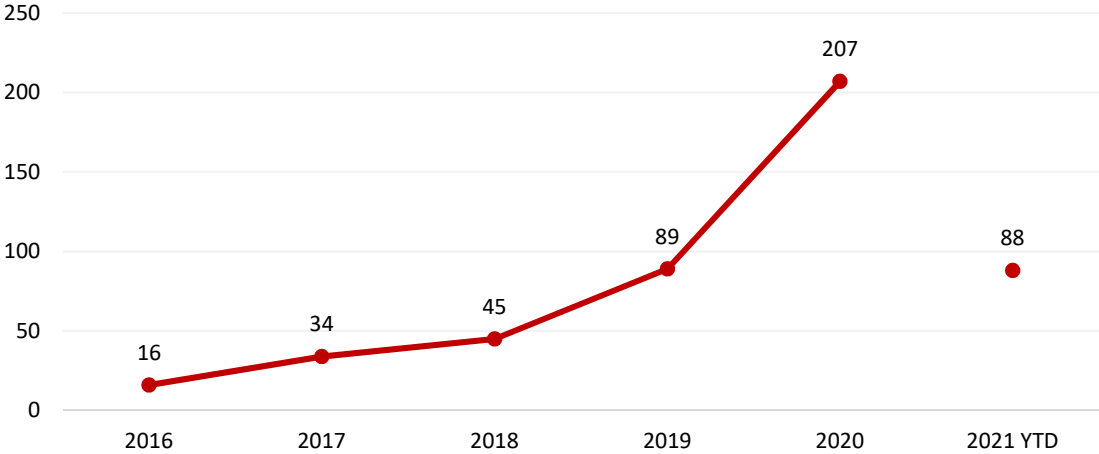
Surveillance Alert

2021 Fentanyl Overdoses

Report Period: January through April

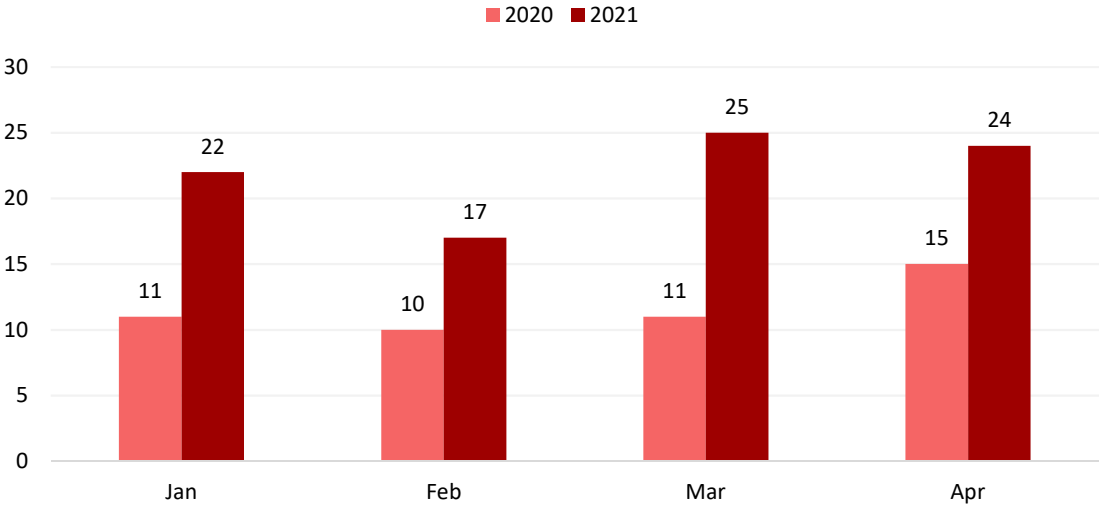
Fentanyl Overdose Death Advisory: The first four months of 2021 has seen an accelerated rate of overdose deaths caused by fentanyl, with 88 lives taken so far. At this rate, the projected 2021 total is set to exceed that of the record-breaking 207 lives lost to fentanyl in 2020.

Fentanyl Overdose Deaths 2016 - April 2021



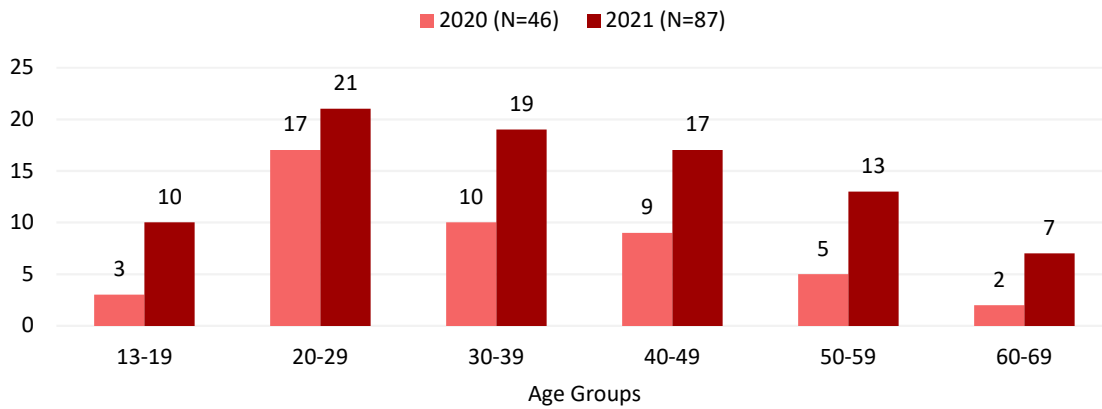
By Month: Over the first four months of the year, there has been an 87% increase in fentanyl-related deaths compared to the same time period in 2020. Each month has surpassed their respective monthly 2020 totals. The largest increase was seen in March with a 127% increase.

Fentanyl Overdose Deaths by Month, Jan - April 2020 vs 2021



By Age: In comparing the months of January through April in 2020 and 2021, all age groups under age 70 have seen an increase in fentanyl-related deaths. The highest increases occurred in ages 13-19 with a 233% increase and ages 60-69 with a 250% increase.

Fentanyl Overdose Deaths by Ages 13 and Older, Jan - April 2020 vs 2021



Average Age of Decedents: The average age of overdose decedents has dropped significantly in the past four years, in part due to rapid increases in teens and young adults dying from fentanyl.

Ten teens lost their lives to accidental drug overdose in the first four months of this year. All of them were caused by fentanyl.

Teens 13-19



100%

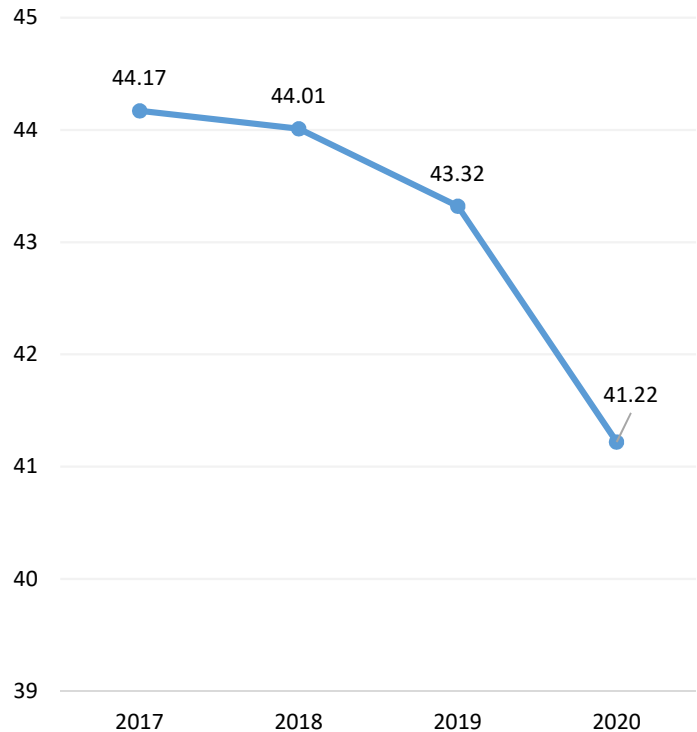
Young Adults 20-29



88%

Twenty-four 20-29 year olds lost their lives to accidental drug overdose in the first four months of this year. 88% of them were caused by fentanyl.

Average Age of Decedents



Provider Recommendations and Risk Factors Regarding Fentanyl Toxicity

Provider Recommendations

- Alert patients and post signs explaining the extreme risk of overdose/death associated with fentanyl due to its high potency (50-100x the strength of morphine) and unpredictable concentrations.
- Place additional emphasis on education aimed at younger populations who may be experimenting or opioid naïve (low tolerance).
- Promote harm reduction to mitigate risks (e.g. never use alone, carry naloxone, tell a supportive person prior to using, never use multiple drugs simultaneously, and use fentanyl test strips).
- Distribute fentanyl test strips and naloxone as frequently as possible for patients and families.
- Encourage discarding a substance whenever fentanyl is detected with a test strip.
- Advise patients to use small, incremental amounts to test the effects of a drug; never assume the remaining contents will produce the same effect.
- If you are an eligible provider, consider obtaining a [buprenorphine waiver](#) to help support local efforts to treat opioid use disorder.

Overdose Risk Factors

- Using drugs alone or in secret if others are present.
- Drug use following a period of abstinence, particularly after release from a hospital, jail, or other facility.
- Consuming sedatives with other sedatives (e.g., opioids with alcohol, benzodiazepines, or hypnotics).
- Consuming sedatives with psychostimulants (e.g., opioids with cocaine or amphetamines).
- Experimenting with drugs as someone with little tolerance and/or poor understanding of the risks.
- Inability to judge the strength of illicitly produced fentanyl due to unpredictable concentrations.

Our Commitment

- The Health Department will continue to conduct surveillance, closely monitor these trends, and share all findings and recommendations as they materialize.
- We have accelerated local naloxone distribution with the goal of community-wide coverage and accessibility. We anticipate a minimum 400% increase in quantity of naloxone kits distributed in 2021.
- With the recent legalization of fentanyl test strips and the approval to use federal grant dollars to purchase these kits, efforts are now underway to bring this resource to our community in 2021, free of cost.
- Lastly, we are offering free presentations for youth and young adults about fentanyl. These can be arranged by you or your agency at any time, and we will provide everything required.

We hope this information will support treatment strategies and informative health messaging for patient populations. To learn more about how to obtain free naloxone, availability of fentanyl test strips, or to schedule a presentation, please contact us at CMHA@Pima.Gov or call (520) 724-7797.

Sincerely,



Mark Person, MSP
Program Manager
Pima County Health Department
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