

December 20, 2019

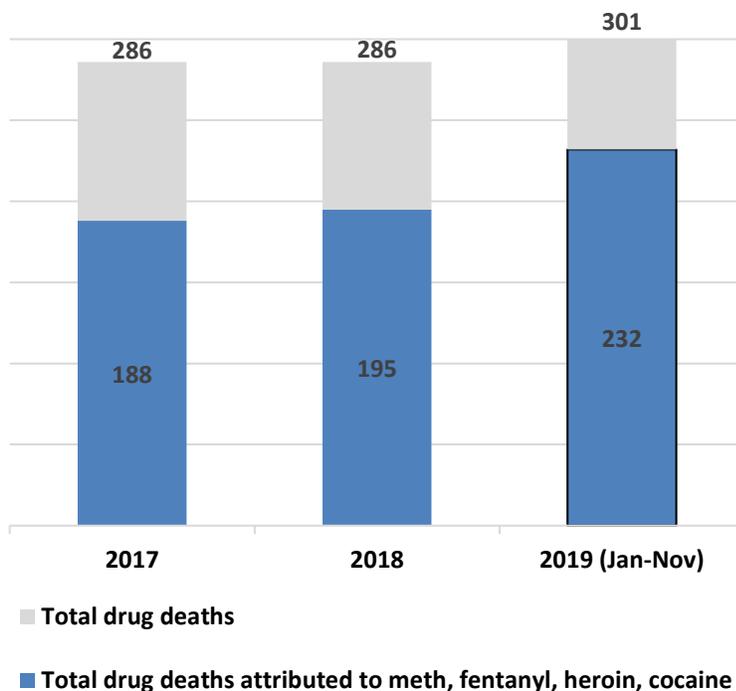
RE: Sustained Increase in Fentanyl, Methamphetamine, Heroin, and Cocaine Related Overdose Deaths

Dear Community Providers,

This notification serves as a status update to the June 21, 2019 alert **RE: Increase in Fentanyl related Overdose Deaths**. The previous alert was issued in response to a sharp increase in fentanyl overdoses. Since then we have seen a sustained increase in such deaths as well as new developments in demographic trends. Current surveillance findings show a year to date total of 70 fentanyl deaths in 2019. The projected total by the end of 2019 is on pace for >80 deaths. This change represents an estimated 77% increase in total fentanyl deaths from 2018 (45) to 2019.

In addition, the steady number of heroin deaths, and continuous increases in meth and cocaine related deaths in 2019, have created a significant rise in overdoses this year. As a result, the total number of overdose deaths in Pima County has eclipsed the 300 mark for the first time in a given year.

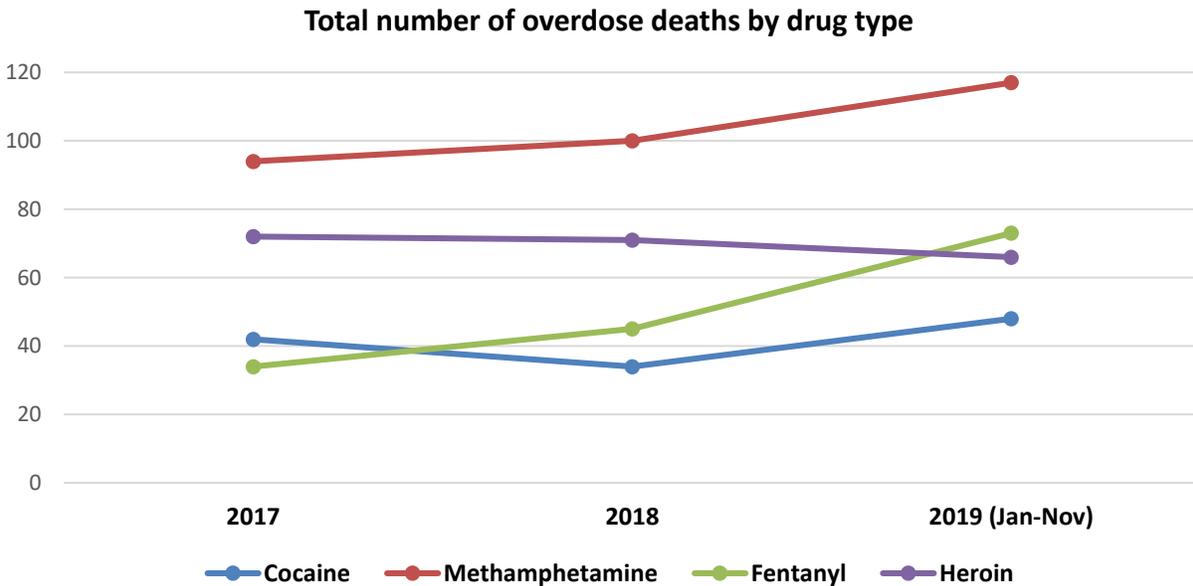
Drug Deaths attributed to Meth, Fentanyl, Heroin, and Cocaine vs All Drugs



The Pima County Health Department is asking all local health providers to continue to alert patients and families of the extreme risk of overdose or death that has been consistently reported throughout Pima County, the State of Arizona, and across the nation.

The surge of illicit narcotics and dangerous stimulants has exacerbated the opioid epidemic. Prescription drug overdose deaths have been largely replaced by deaths attributed to **methamphetamine, fentanyl, heroin, and cocaine**. The presence of these drugs complicates the risks, as they come in unpredictable concentrations and are commonly mixed with various narcotics to intensify their effect.

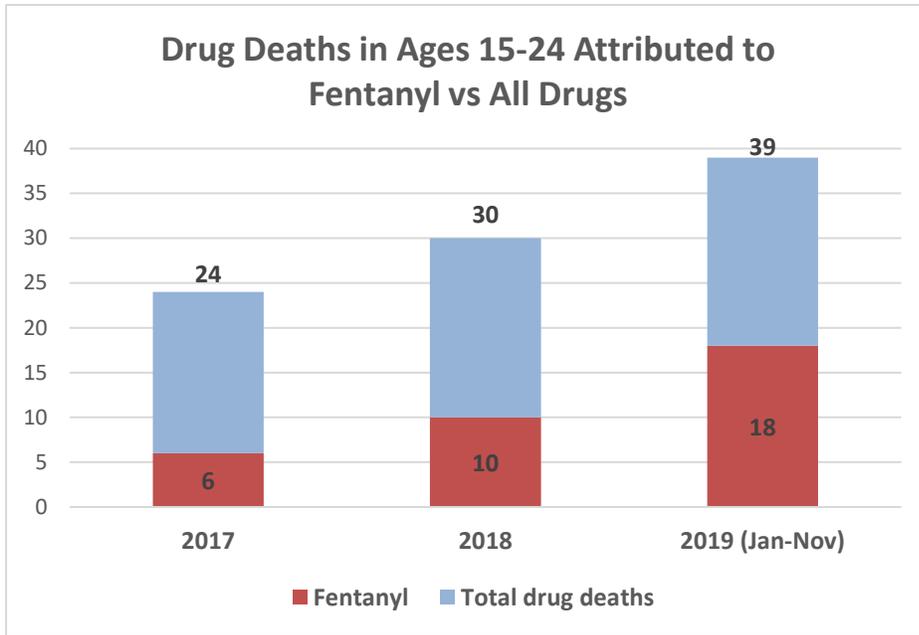
While all of these drugs together are a significant factor in this epidemic, methamphetamine overdoses make up the largest single drug contribution with 117 deaths so far in 2019, followed by fentanyl (73), heroin (66), and cocaine (48).



The multitude of risk factors with these drugs make it difficult to predict who might be at highest risk. A person’s history or specified drug addiction will not explain the likelihood of an overdose. The single most important risk factor to understand is that anyone who accepts a drug/substance outside the supervision of a medical provider and a dispensing pharmacy is at risk of overdose. In most fatal overdoses involving these 4 drugs the death is accidental and the true contents and potency of the drug are unknown to the person.

At highest risk are individuals who:

- Obtain drugs from a dealer in the form of powder, liquid, or counterfeit pills, and administer by injection, snorting, or smoking.
- Mix drugs with alcohol, sedatives, or stimulants, in an effort to intensify feelings of euphoria and satisfy physical addiction.
- Consume stimulants and opioids simultaneously, particularly short acting stimulants such as powder cocaine or crack cocaine paired with any opioid.
- Are currently struggling with a substance use disorder of any kind.
- Have recently left a sober living environment, hospital, jail, prison, or rehab facility.



Lastly, we have also observed a greater number of teens and young adults being impacted by fentanyl specifically. This is in part due to the high potency of the drug and the inexperience, vulnerability, and poor comprehension of the risks. As a result, a growing number of young people have lost their lives to this drug in 2019. This changing trend is illustrated in the table to the left.

The Health Department will continue to conduct surveillance, closely monitor these trends, and will produce public facing reports and alerts. We hope this information will support treatment strategies, healthy messaging to patient populations and families, and a clear understanding of the significant risks associated with these drugs. If you have questions, please contact our Community Mental Health and Addiction team at CMHA@Pima.Gov or call (520) 724-7797. Thank you for all that you do.

Sincerely,

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Pima County Health Department

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