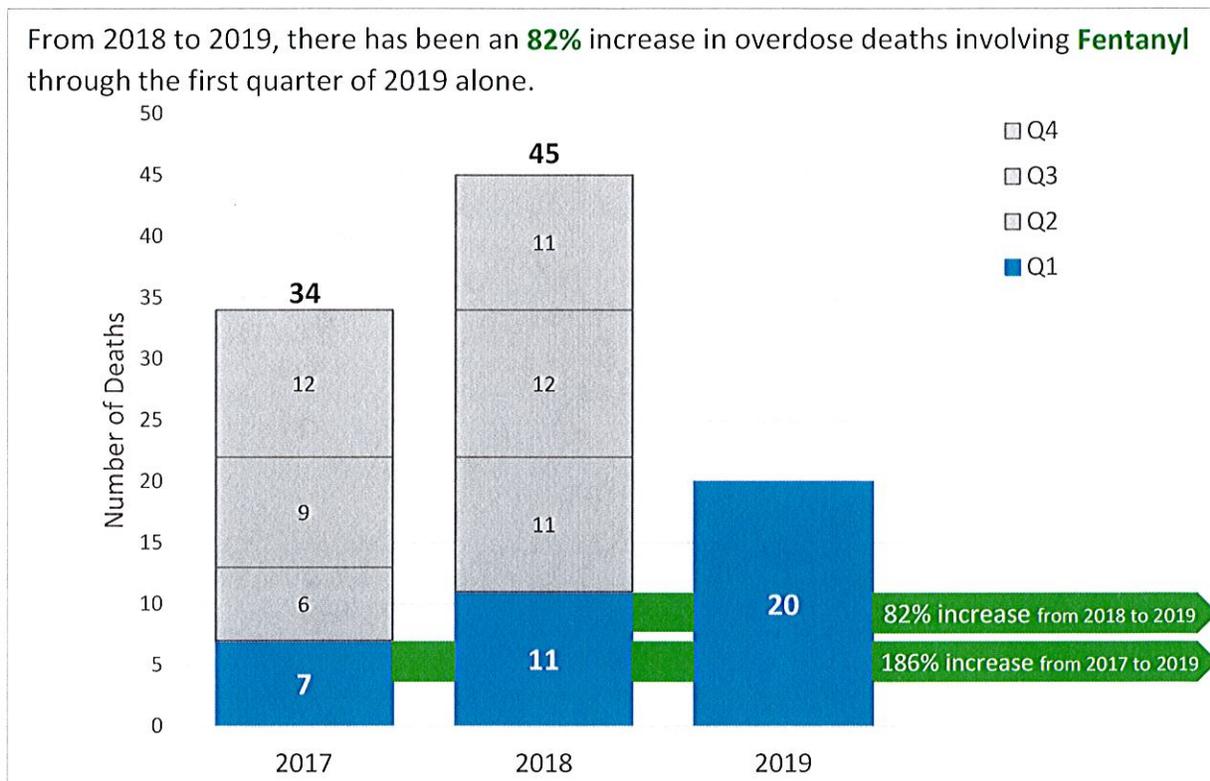


June 21, 2019

**RE: Increase in Fentanyl related Overdose Deaths in Pima County**

Dear Community Partner,

In recent months, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of overdose deaths in Pima County, which were caused by Fentanyl. There were 20 total deaths for the first quarter of 2019 alone. While Fentanyl overdoses have been on the rise, 20 deaths in a single quarter is an unprecedented concentration in such a short timeframe. The chart below illustrates the sudden spike in fatalities.



In response, **The Pima County Health Department is asking all local substance use providers to please alert patients and families of the increase in Fentanyl overdoses and encourage safe practices.** Individuals with an opioid use disorder or any recent opioid use are at an increased risk of experiencing an overdose, particularly those who purchase/acquire the drug illegally.

### What patients and families need to know?

- In most cases these deaths are ruled “accidental”, meaning the individual took a lethal dose of Fentanyl unknowingly which lead to their death.
- Fentanyl on the street may give the appearance of a prescription drug like Oxycodone or Hydrocodone, however, it is impossible to know whether or not it contains Fentanyl or the exact strength or potency in each pill.
- Fentanyl is more powerful than morphine or heroin and one pill is enough to kill an adult.

### How you can help?

- Talk about these risks with patients and families to spread awareness and reinforce safe practices
- Never take a pill that’s been given or sold on the street. Unless prescribed and distributed directly by a pharmacist, the contents are unknown. The only way to be 100% safe is to avoid these drugs completely.
- Make sure people understand the potency of Fentanyl and that a high number of deaths have been associated with it.
- Promote harm reduction to help decrease the risks.
- Distribute Naloxone to high risk patients and their families to take with them.
- Hand out Fentanyl test strips to individuals at risk.
- Emphasize the increased risk of overdose when drugs are mixed with alcohol or any other substance.
- Encourage the use of detox, inpatient stabilization, MAT, or outpatient support services.
- Emphasize the risk of overdose following periods of abstinence, particularly when a person is leaving a hospital, ED, or detention setting.
- Fentanyl can be lethal in very small amounts. For those who cannot avoid it despite the risk, a minuscule amount of the drug should be tested first to at least decrease the chances of an unintentional overdose.

If you have questions about this notification or want to learn how your agency can obtain free Naloxone, please do not hesitate to contact our Community Mental Health and Addiction team at [CMHA@Pima.Gov](mailto:CMHA@Pima.Gov) or call the Health Department at (520) 724-7797. For clinical guidance related to opioid use and prescribing, contact **Arizona OAR Line at 1-888-688-4222**

We thank you in advance for your support and participation.

Sincerely,



Bob England, MD, MPH  
Department Interim Director



Mark Person, MSP  
Program Manager  
Community Mental Health and Addiction