

Pima County Monthly Surveillance Report 2021 Fatal Overdoses

Review Period: January through June

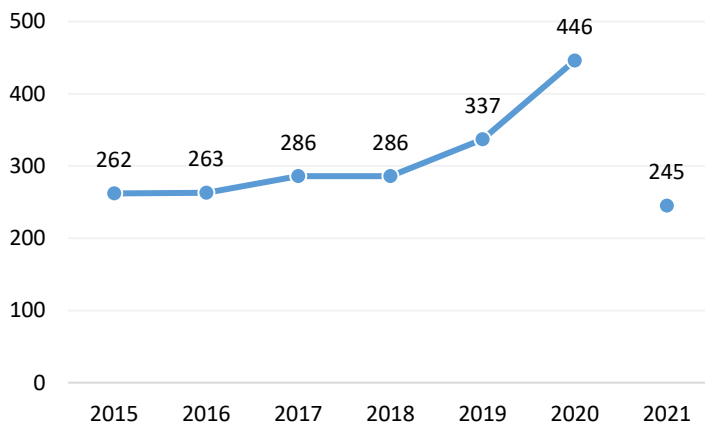
Purpose: The Health Department's Community Mental Health and Addiction unit conducts routine surveillance of local drug overdose trends. Surveillance looks at specific data sets to monitor and record trends in critical public health indicators commonly associated with substance use and drug overdoses. 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.

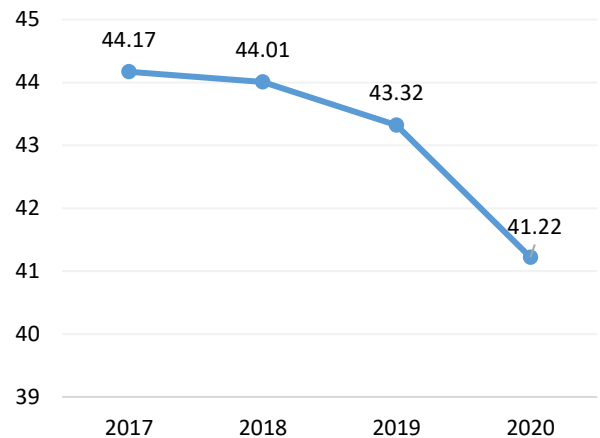
Source: Vital Records Death Certificate Data and Pima County's Office of the Medical Examiner.

Summary: A total of 245 overdose deaths have been confirmed to date. The number of overdose deaths in 2021 is projected to exceed 500, based on the monthly average for January through May. Due to the data lag, June deaths are not included in the monthly average. In the past four years, the average age of overdose decedents has dropped significantly, in part due to increases in teens and young adults dying from fentanyl.

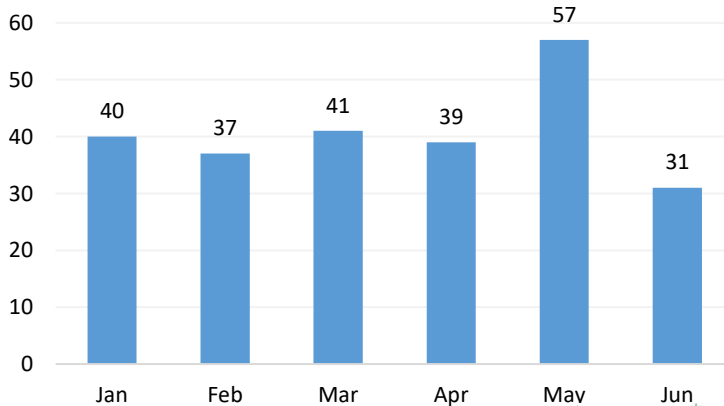
Drug Overdose Deaths by Year
2015 - 2021 YTD



Average Age of Decedents
2017 - 2020

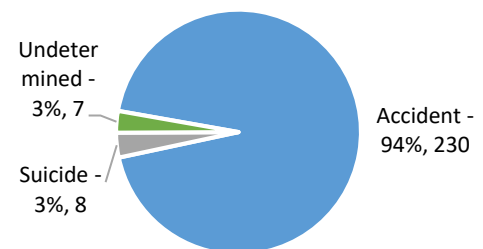


Drug Overdose Deaths by Month, 2021
Total: 245



Overdose Deaths by Manner of Death

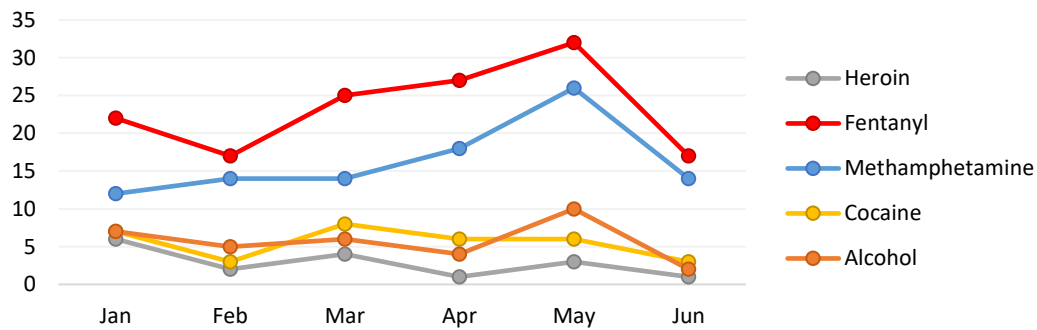
January - June 2021



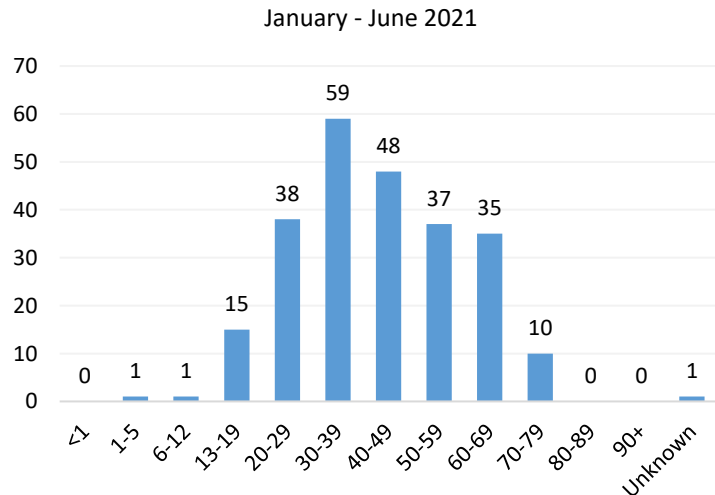
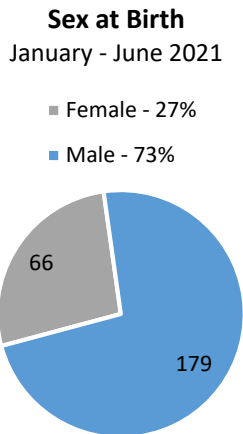
Drug data: A majority of overdose deaths involved an opioid (71%) or psychostimulant (55%). Nearly one third of overdose deaths listed both an opioid and a psychostimulant in the cause of death. An overdose death may involve more than one substance, therefore counts related to specific types of substances do not sum to the total number of deaths. Fentanyl continues to be the most common drug contributing to death, followed by methamphetamine.

Overdose Deaths involving Opioids, Psychostimulants or Both		
January - June 2021		
Opioids	175	71%
Psychostimulant	134	55%
Both	75	31%

Top 5 Drugs Contributing to Overdose Deaths by Month
January - June 2021

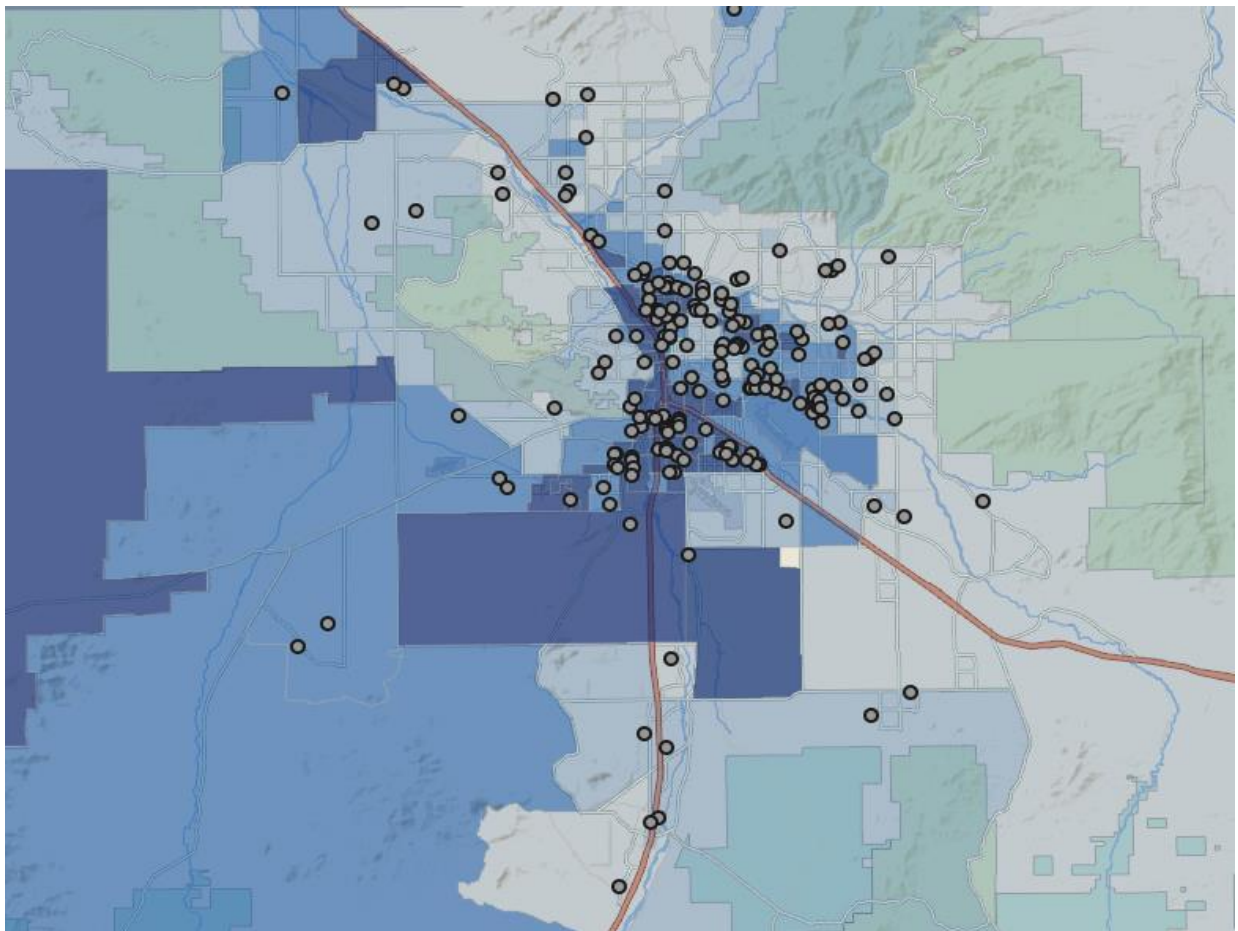
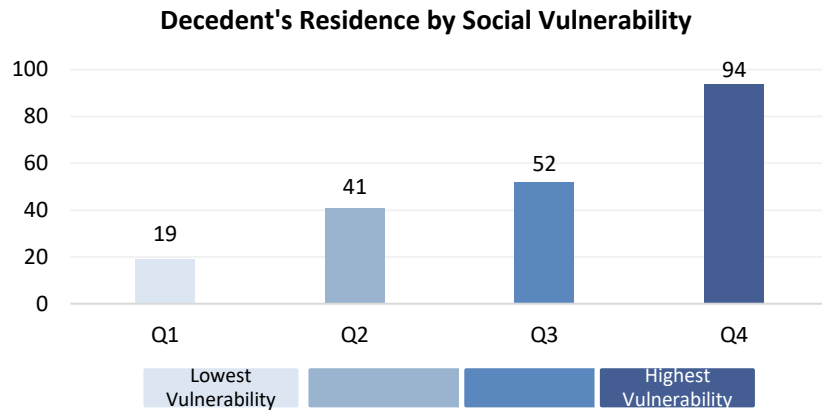


Demographics: Overdose deaths have been highest in males (73%) and decedents age 30-39 (24%). Notably, in decedents 19 and under, the number of overdose deaths in 2021 currently matches the total seen in 2020 (17).



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 21 decedents with no known address and 18 with out of county or out of state addresses.*

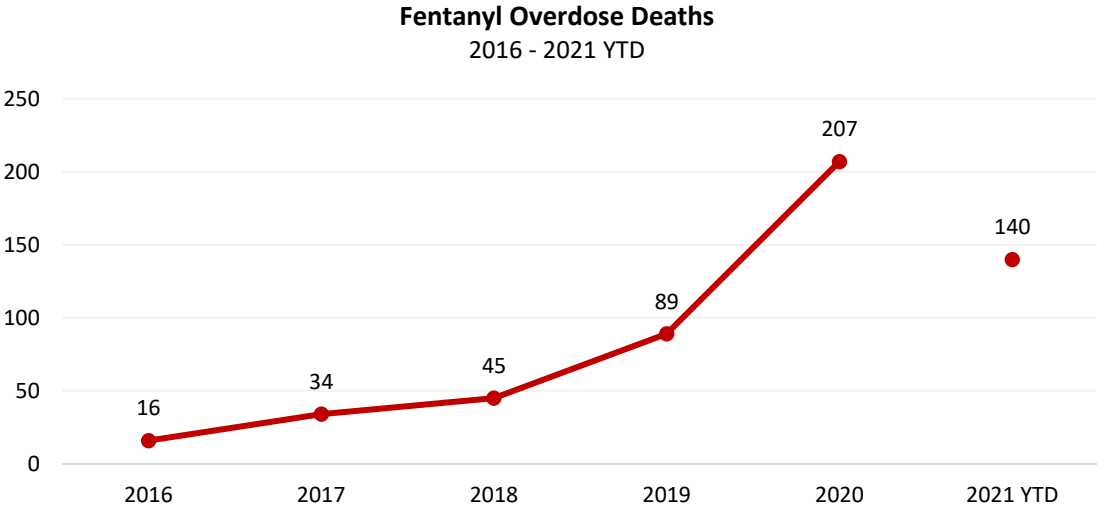


Surveillance Alert

2021 Fentanyl Overdoses

Report Period: January through June

Fentanyl Overdose Death Advisory: Compared to the same time period last year, there has been a 59% increase in fentanyl-related deaths. At the current rate, the projected end of year total is set to exceed that of the record-breaking 207 lives lost to fentanyl in 2020. Among all accidental overdoses, young persons 29 and under have the highest fentanyl involvement.



Accidental Overdose Deaths in Young Persons

January - June 2021

● Fentanyl ● Non-Fentanyl

Youth (19 and under)



16 youth have died of a fentanyl overdose in 2021, making fentanyl the #1 cause of death for youth in Pima County.

Young Adult (20-29)



37 young adults have died of a accidental overdose, and 81% of those involved fentanyl.

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) 724-7470.



Mark Person, MSP
Program Manager
Pima County Health Department
Mark.Person@Pima.Gov

A Healthy Pima County
Everyone. Everywhere. Everyday.



CMHA@pima.gov
www.pima.gov/mentalhealth