Increase in Deaths Due to Drug Overdose

Deaths due to Drug Overdose in the US

Known as one of the causes of deaths of despair (DOD), a recent MMWR indicates that deaths due to drug overdose continue to be a critical public health problem in the United States. A total of 70,237 people died due to drug overdose in the US in 2017, a 10% relative increase compared to 2016. This increase continues the trend of increasing deaths due to drug overdose that has been occurring for over a decade (Figure 1; Source: CDC). As the leading cause of death for Americans under 50 years of age, drug overdoses cause more deaths than firearms, motor vehicle crashes, or HIV/AIDS.

Deaths due to Drug Overdose in Florida

Though Florida experienced a brief period of decline in the rate of drug overdose death from 2010 – 2013, dipping below national rates in 2012, rates began increasing again in 2014, surpassing the national rate in 2016 and 2017 (Figure 1). However, data from the 2018 Interim Report of the Florida Medical Examiners indicate a 5% relative decrease in drug overdose death overall in January-June 2018 compared to the same period in 2017, though deaths caused by fentanyl increased 164%. There are significant variations in drug overdose death by county with higher rates in Palm Beach, Monroe, Manatee, Citrus, Marion, and Duval.

Different Drugs for Overdose Deaths

The reduction in drug overdose deaths from 2010 to 2013 corresponded to the period when the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program and the Pill Mill Laws for prescription drugs were passed and enacted in Florida. The resurgence in drug overdose deaths beginning in 2014 is primarily due to increases in nonprescription drugs, including illegal fentanyl, heroin (often indistinguishable from morphine in toxicology findings), and cocaine, as shown in the 2019 Annual Report of Substance Use in Florida.
For more information, please visit the following:

**Additional Information Sources**


Florida’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program

National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA). Florida Opioid Summary


Florida Medical Examiners Commission: Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons by Florida Medical Examiners. 2018 Interim Report.

**References**


