

# Substance Abuse Trends *Alert!*

November 2019

## 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.<sup>1,2,3</sup> A total of 70,237 people died due to drug overdose in the US in 2017, a 10% relative increase compared to 2016.<sup>4</sup> This increase continues the trend of increasing deaths due to drug overdose that has been occurring for over a decade (Figure 1; Source: [CDC](#)).<sup>4,5</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

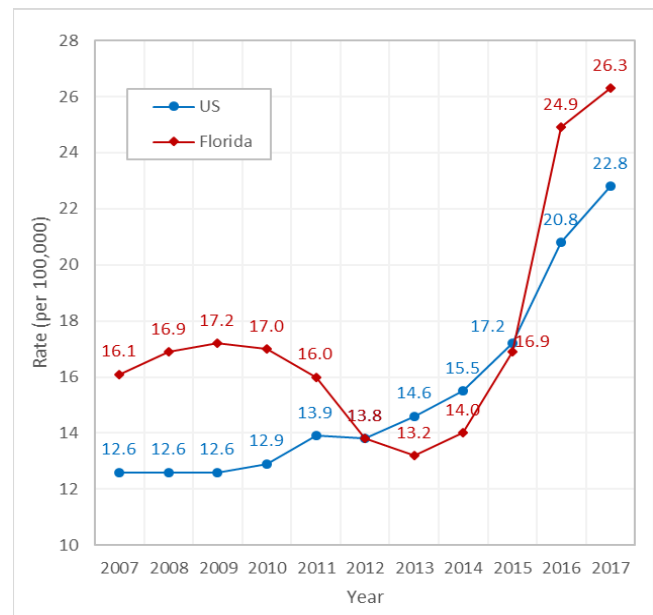
### Deaths due to Drug Overdose in Florida

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%.<sup>6</sup> There are significant variations in drug overdose death by county with higher rates in Palm Beach, Monroe, Manatee, Citrus, Marion, and Duval.<sup>6</sup>

### 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.<sup>7,8</sup> 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](#).



**Figure 1.** Drug overdose deaths per 100,000 population, Florida and the US, 2007 – 2017.

### Need for New Strategies

Although the increase in drug overdose deaths decelerated from 2016 to 2017 in Florida, deaths caused by and involving fentanyl increased sharply from 2017 to 2018. Though progress has been made in combatting the epidemic of fatal overdoses attributed to prescription opioids, different strategies are indicated to reduce deaths due to illicitly available drugs such as fentanyl in Florida, and more specifically in counties with high rates of drug overdose death.

For more information, please visit the following:

### **Additional Information Sources**

[Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association. Patterns and Trends of Substance Use within and Across the Regions of Florida April 2019.](#)

[Florida's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program](#)

[National Institute of Drug Abuse \(NIDA\), Florida Opioid Summary](#)

[National Institutes of Justice. Florida Legislation Helps Reduce the Number of "Pill Mills". Press Release.](#)

[Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report \(MMWR\), 2019. Drug and Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths — United States, 2013–2017.](#)

[Florida Medical Examiners Commission: Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons by Florida Medical Examiners. 2018 Interim Report.](#)

### **References**

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4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. **CDC Wonder**. <http://wonder.cdc.gov/>. April 1995.
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6. Florida Medical Examiners Commission. *2018 Interim Report of Drugs Identified in Deceased Persons by Florida Medical Examiners*.
7. Rutkow L, Chang H-Y, Daubresse M, Webster DW, Stuart EA, Alexander GC. Effect of Florida's prescription drug monitoring program and pill mill laws on opioid prescribing and use. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2015;175(10):1642-1649. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2015.3931
8. Delcher C, Wang Y, Wagenaar AC, Goldberger BA, Cook RL, Maldonado-Molina MM. Prescription and illicit opioid deaths and the prescription drug monitoring program in Florida. *Am J Public Health*. 2016;106(6):e10-1. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2016.303104