

FIRST QUARTER MAINE DRUG DEATH REPORT

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This report, funded by the Maine Office of Attorney General, provides a summary of statistics regarding drug fatalities in Maine during January-March, 2018. Data for the report were collected at the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. A “drug death” is identified when one or more drugs are mentioned on the death certificate as a cause or significant contributing factor for the death.

Overview

Total fatalities due to drugs during the first quarter of 2018 number 86, slightly fewer than the total of 89 last year in the same period. The high number of fatal overdoses in Maine continues to be driven by non-pharmaceutical fentanyl and fentanyl analogs, 65% of deaths, whereas pharmaceutical opioids caused 20%. Compared to 2017 as a whole, the proportion of illicit (non-pharmaceutical) drug deaths has stayed the same, at 73%, while the proportion of pharmaceutical drugs has decreased from 61% to 49%. We note that deaths involving fentanyl and fentanyl analogs are less likely than in 2017 to involve other opioids or alcohol. Note that quarterly totals have fluctuated over the past several years, with slightly more deaths in the second and third quarters than in the first and fourth.

Manners of death: Of 86 deaths during the first quarter, 76 (88%) were accidental overdoses, 8 (9%) were suicides, and 2 (2%) undetermined manner.

Overall patterns of note during the first quarter:

- Most (66%) drug deaths were caused by two or more drugs. The average cause of death involved 3 drugs. The proportion of deaths caused by only one drug was 23%, up slightly compared to 20% in 2017 as a whole.
- The vast majority of overdoses (84%) were caused by at least one opioid, including both pharmaceutical and illicit (non-pharmaceutical) opioid drugs, about the same as 2016 (84%) and 2017 (85%).
- Pharmaceutical opioid deaths constituted 20% of drug deaths, continuing a trend downward from 33% in 2016 and 30% in 2017.
- Non-pharmaceutical fentanyl (and/or its analogs) caused 65% of deaths, alone or in combination with other drugs, continuing to trend upward from 52% in 2016, and 59% in 2017¹.
- Compared to 2017 as a whole, first quarter 2018 deaths due to non-pharmaceutical fentanyl (and/or its analogs) are less likely to involve other drugs (50% compared to 87%), including heroin (13% compared to 22%), pharmaceutical opioids (5% compared to 18%), alcohol (22% compared to 28%), benzodiazepines (10% compared to 18%), and cocaine (15% compared to 22%)

¹ The 2017 annual report cited 58% due to opioid drugs, but this figure was later updated to 59%.

- Heroin caused 16% of deaths, alone or in combination with other drugs, continuing to trend downward from 32% in 2016, and 21% in 2017.
- Cocaine or crack caused 19% of deaths, alone or in combination with other drugs, compared to 16% in 2016 and 22% in 2017.
- Naloxone was present in 28% of opioid deaths, down from in 2016 and 31% in 2017.

Table 1. Demographic patterns:

	Total	Average Age	Age Range	Percent Male
All drug deaths	86	42	19-79	60 (70%)
Accidents	76	41	19-69	56 (75%)
Suicides	8	48	30-79	3 (38%)

Table 2. Involvement of specific drug categories

Specific drug or drug category causing the death (alone or in combination with other drugs and/or alcohol)	Number	Percent of 86 drug deaths
Number of deaths caused by more than one drug	66	77%
Any pharmaceutical drug	42	49%
Any pharmaceutical opioid drug	17	20%
Any opioid (pharmaceutical or non-pharmaceutical) 20 (28%) of 72 opioid deaths had received Naloxone*	72	84%
Any illicitly manufactured drug (includes heroin/morphine, non-pharmaceutical fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, other illicitly-manufactured opioids, cocaine, and methamphetamine)	63	73%
Any non-pharmaceutical opioid drugs (heroin/morphine, fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, U-47700, mitragynine).	60	70%
Heroin/morphine and/or fentanyl or fentanyl analogs	59	69%
Fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs (known pharmaceutical fentanyl removed)	56	65%
Heroin/morphine (known pharmaceutical morphine removed)	14	16%
Any benzodiazepine	15	17%
Cocaine	17	20%
Methamphetamine	3	3%

*Excludes cases with buprenorphine in toxicology.

Non-Pharmaceutical (“Illicit”) Fentanyl and/or Fentanyl Analog Deaths

This category includes deaths caused by non-pharmaceutical (illicitly manufactured) fentanyl or fentanyl analogs. We removed all cases that involved known pharmaceutical fentanyl from these totals. There were 56 overdoses due to non-pharmaceutical fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs in the first quarter of 2018.

- 44 (79%) are male and 12 (21%) are female.
- The average age in non-pharmaceutical fentanyl/fentanyl analog deaths is 38 (age range 23-58).

Table 3. Involvement of co-intoxicant drugs in non-pharmaceutical fentanyl deaths January-March 2018

Specific co-intoxicants in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs identified as a cause of death	Number	Percent of Fentanyl/Fentanyl Analog Deaths N=86
FENTANYL and FENTANYL ANALOG COMBINATIONS		
• Fentanyl (with or without fentanyl analogs)	49	57%
• Fentanyl analogs (with or without fentanyl)	19	22%
• Both non-pharmaceutical fentanyl and at least one fentanyl analog	11	13%
CO-INTOXICANTS IDENTIFIED IN FENTANYL and/or FENTANYL ANALOG DEATHS		
• One or more drugs (or alcohol) in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	43	50%
• One or more pharmaceutical opioids in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	4	5%
• Heroin/morphine in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	11	13%
• Alcohol in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	19	22%
• One or more benzodiazepines in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	8	10%
• Cocaine in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	13	15%

Table 4. Fentanyl analogs identified as a cause of death January-March 2018

Fentanyl Analog Identified	Total Number of Cases*	Percent of Fentanyl Analog-Involved Deaths N=19
Acetyl fentanyl	10	53%
Carfentanil	1	5%
Cyclopropyl Fentanyl	2	11%
Furanyl fentanyl	2	11%
Methoxyacetyl fentanyl	3	16%
Para-fluorobutyryl fentanyl	1	5%

*Some cases had more than one analog.

Heroin/Morphine Deaths

Heroin/morphine deaths include any death in which the cause of death identifies “heroin” or “morphine.” We have removed all cases involving known pharmaceutical morphine, so the heroin/morphine deaths are all suspected heroin overdoses. In the first quarter of 2018 there were 14 deaths due to (non-pharmaceutical) heroin/morphine alone or in combination with other drugs, 16% of all drug deaths. The proportion is lower than 2017 as a whole, when heroin deaths comprised 21% of all drug deaths. All of the first quarter heroin/morphine deaths had co-intoxicants mentioned.

County Totals

This table provides totals for those counties with 10 or more deaths during the first three months of 2018. The reader is cautioned that, because the numbers for individual counties are relatively small, fluctuations may be due more to random chance than to actual changes in underlying epidemiological trends. Additionally, the first quarter totals may not be a good indicator of the year as a whole, due to seasonal fluctuation.

Table 5. Total and proportion of drug deaths by counties with ten or more deaths for 2017 and first quarter of 2018, compared to percent of Maine census population

County	County Proportions 2018 1st Quarter Statewide Total 86	County Proportions 2017 Statewide Total 417*	Proportion of Maine Estimated Census Population 2016
Cumberland	18 (21%)	109 (26%)	22%
Kennebec	14 (16%)	47 (11%)	9%
Penobscot	12 (14%)	65 (16%)	12%
York	11 (13%)	82 (20%)	15%

*The 2017 total has been updated, changing 418 to 417, with new information on one case.