

MAINE DRUG DEATH REPORT JANUARY – SEPTEMBER, 2019

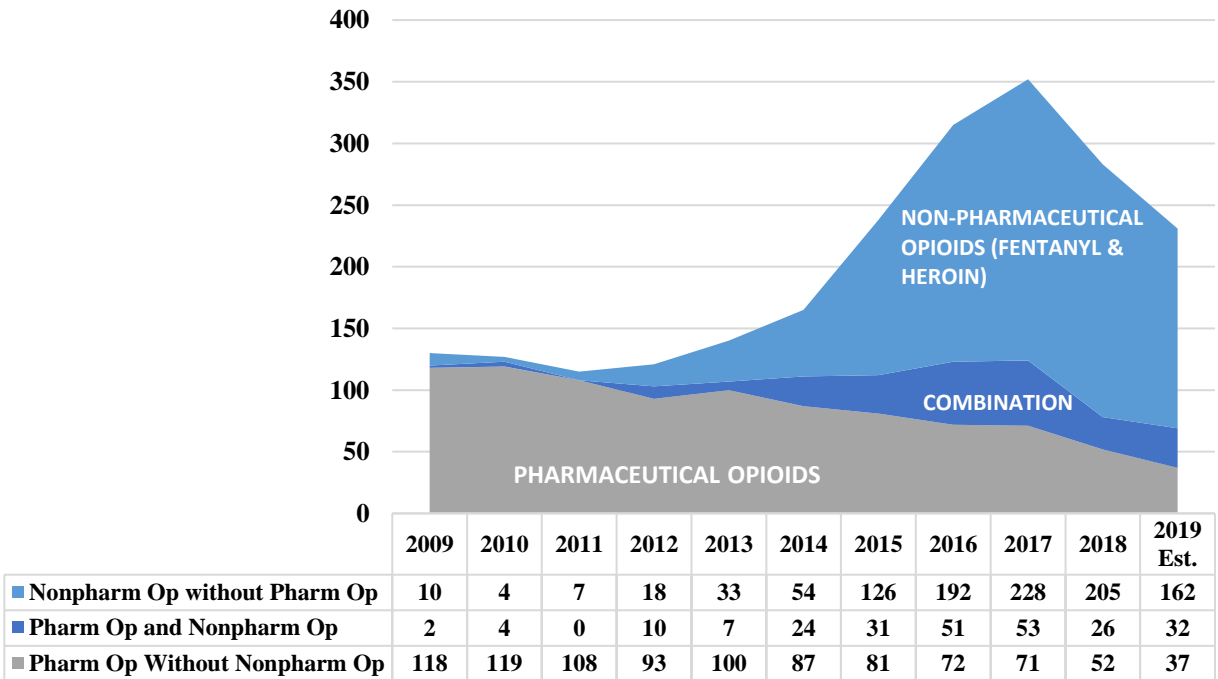
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This report, funded by the Maine Office of Attorney General, provides a summary of statistics regarding drug fatalities in Maine during January-September, 2019. Data for the report were collected at the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. A “drug death” 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 to third quarters of 2019 number 277. Using this number to forecast the total for the year yields 369, which is 4% higher than the total of 354 last year. Fatal overdoses in Maine continue to be driven by illicit, non-pharmaceutical fentanyl and fentanyl analogs, 68% of deaths, whereas the proportion of pharmaceutical opioid deaths (25%) has declined from 28% (see Figure 1). Compared to 2018 as a whole, the proportion of illicit (non-pharmaceutical) drug deaths, including non-pharmaceutical fentanyl, heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine, has increased from 73% to 78% and the proportion of pharmaceutical drugs (opioids as well as other pharmaceutical drugs) has increased from 56% to 61%.

**FIGURE 1. 2009-2019 MAINE DRUG DEATHS
PHARMACEUTICAL VERSUS NONPHARMACEUTICAL OPIOIDS**



Manners of death: Of the 277 deaths during the first three quarters, 246 (89%) were accidental overdoses, 27 (10%) were suicides, and 4 (1%) had an undetermined manner of death.

Overall patterns of note during the first three quarters:

- Most deaths (217, 78%) were caused by illicit drugs, including non-pharmaceutical fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine.
- Most deaths (229, 82%) 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 44 (16%), down slightly compared to 64 (18%) in 2018 as a whole.
- The vast majority of overdoses (233, 84%) were caused by at least one opioid, including both pharmaceutical and illicit (non-pharmaceutical) opioid drugs, about the same proportion as 2016 (84%), 2017 (85%) and 2018 (82%).
- Pharmaceutical opioid deaths constituted 69 (25%) of drug deaths, slightly reversing a trend downward from 33% in 2016, to 30% in 2017 and 22% in 2018.
- Non-pharmaceutical fentanyl (and/or its analogs) caused 187 (68%) deaths, alone or in combination with other drugs, continuing to trend upward from 52% in 2016, to 59% in 2017¹ and 61% in 2018. Non-pharmaceutical fentanyl deaths constituted 80% of all opioid deaths in 2019.
- Compared to 2018 as a whole, 2019 deaths due to non-pharmaceutical fentanyl (and/or its analogs) are more likely to involve pharmaceutical opioids (14% compared to 10%).
- Heroin caused 44 (16%) deaths, alone or in combination with other drugs, continuing a downward trend from 32% in 2016, to 21% in 2017 and 21% in 2018.
- Cocaine or crack caused 79 (29%) of deaths, alone or in combination with other drugs, continuing a trend upward from 16% in 2016, to 22% in 2017 and 25% in 2018.
- Naloxone was present in 35% of opioid deaths, an increase from 30% in 2018.
- Methamphetamine caused 29 (10%) deaths, alone or in combination with other drugs, continuing a trend upward from 2% in 2016, to 4% in 2017 and 7% in 2018.

Table 1. Demographic patterns:

	Total	Average Age	Age Range	Percent Male
All drug deaths	277	43	18-88	188 (68%)
Accidents	246	42	18-88	176 (72%)
Suicides	27	53	25-86	11 (41%)

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 277 drug deaths
Number of deaths caused by more than one drug	228	82%
Any pharmaceutical drug	169	61%
Any pharmaceutical opioid drug	69	25%
Any opioid (pharmaceutical or non-pharmaceutical) 81 (35%) of 233 opioid deaths had received Naloxone*	233	84%

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

Any illicitly manufactured drug (includes heroin/morphine, non-pharmaceutical fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, other illicitly-manufactured opioids, cocaine, and methamphetamine)	217	78%
Any non-pharmaceutical opioid drugs (heroin/morphine, fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, U-47700, mitragynine).	194	70%
Heroin/morphine combined with fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	194	70%
Fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs (known pharmaceutical fentanyl removed)	187	68%
Heroin/morphine (known pharmaceutical morphine removed)	44	16%
Any benzodiazepine	62	22%
Cocaine	80	29%
Methamphetamine	29	10%

*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 187 overdoses due to non-pharmaceutical fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs in the first three quarters of 2019.

- 140 (75%) are male and 47 (25%) are female.
- The average age in non-pharmaceutical fentanyl/fentanyl analog deaths is 40 (age range 18-71).

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

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=187
FENTANYL and FENTANYL ANALOG COMBINATIONS		
• Fentanyl (with or without fentanyl analogs)	184	98%
• Fentanyl analogs (with or without fentanyl)	59	32%
• <u>Both</u> non-pharmaceutical fentanyl and at least one fentanyl analog	56	30%
CO-INTOXICANTS IDENTIFIED IN FENTANYL and/or FENTANYL ANALOG DEATHS		
• One or more drugs (or alcohol) in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	153	82%
• One or more pharmaceutical opioids in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	27	14%
• Heroin/morphine in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	37	20%
• Alcohol in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	54	29%
• One or more benzodiazepines in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	31	17%
• Cocaine in addition to fentanyl and/or fentanyl analogs	65	35%

Table 4. Fentanyl analogs identified as a cause of death January-September 2019

Fentanyl Analog Identified	Total Number of Cases*	Percent of Fentanyl Analog-Involved Deaths N=59
4-ANPP Fentanyl	1	2%
Acetyl Fentanyl	49	83%
Carfentanil	3	5%
Furanyl Fentanyl	1	2%
Parafluoroisobutyryl Fentanyl	6	10%
Valeryl Fentanyl	6	10%

*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 three quarters of 2019 there were 44 deaths due to (non-pharmaceutical) heroin/morphine alone or in combination with other drugs, 16% of all drug deaths. The proportion is lower than 2018 as a whole, when heroin deaths comprised 26% of all drug deaths. All of the first three quarters' heroin/morphine deaths had co-intoxicants mentioned.

County Totals

This table provides totals by county during the first three quarters of 2019. The reader is cautioned that, because the numbers for individual counties are relatively small, fluctuations between years may be due more to random chance than to actual changes in underlying epidemiological trends.

Table 5. Total drug deaths by county for the first three quarters of 2019 and for 2018, compared to percent of Maine census population.

County	Total Number (Percent) of Overdose Deaths 1st Three Quarters of 2019 (Total = 277)	Total Number (Percent) of Overdose Deaths 2018 (Total = 354)	Percent of Maine Estimated Census Population 2017 (Total = 1,335,907)
Androscoggin	22 (8%)	33 (9%)	8%
Aroostook	8 (5%)	8 (2%)	5%
Cumberland	79 (29%)	88 (23%)	22%
Franklin	4 (1%)	5 (1%)	2%
Hancock	5 (2%)	10 (3%)	4%
Kennebec	28 (10%)	43 (12%)	9%
Knox	6 (2%)	6 (2%)	3%

Lincoln	10 (4%)	6 (2%)	3%
Oxford	5 (2%)	13 (4%)	4%
Penobscot	34 (12%)	53 (15%)	11%
Piscataquis	2 (1%)	5 (1%)	1%
Sagadahoc	6 (2%)	2 (1%)	3%
Somerset	13 (5%)	10 (3%)	4%
Waldo	3 (1%)	9 (3%)	3%
Washington	9 (3%)	9 (3%)	2%
York	43 (16%)	54 (15%)	15%