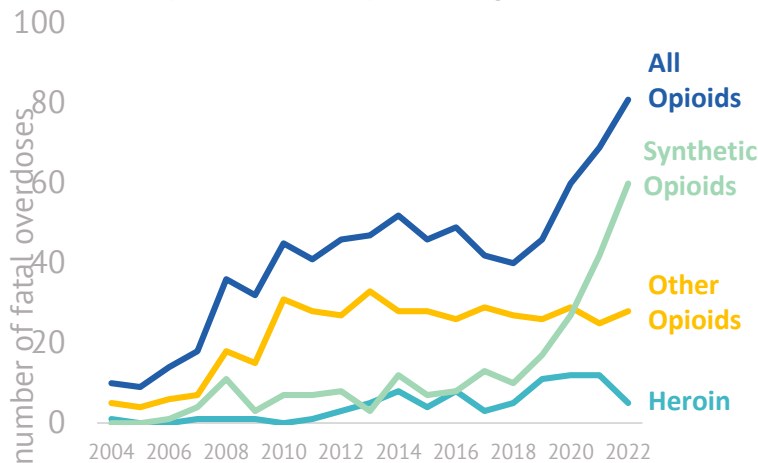


# Opioid-Involved Fatal Overdose

In the past five years there have been 472 fatal overdoses among Wyoming residents, two thirds (63%) involved opioids. In recent years, fentanyl has become increasingly prevalent in the U.S. illicit drug supply. Nationally, fentanyl and its analogs have contributed to a rising number of fatal drug overdoses, a trend which also can be seen in Wyoming.<sup>1</sup>

Opioid-involved fatal overdoses rates (per 100,000) by drug type\*



**The majority of opioid-involved fatal overdoses include commonly prescribed opioids.**

Other opioids include commonly prescribed opioids such as codeine, oxycodone, or hydrocodone. These can also be obtained illicitly. Although rates of other opioids increased rapidly between 2004-2010, the rate of other opioid involved fatal overdose has remained relatively stable since 2010.

Since 2017, the rates of synthetic opioid-involved while other opioid and heroin-involved fatal overdose have remained stable or decreased.

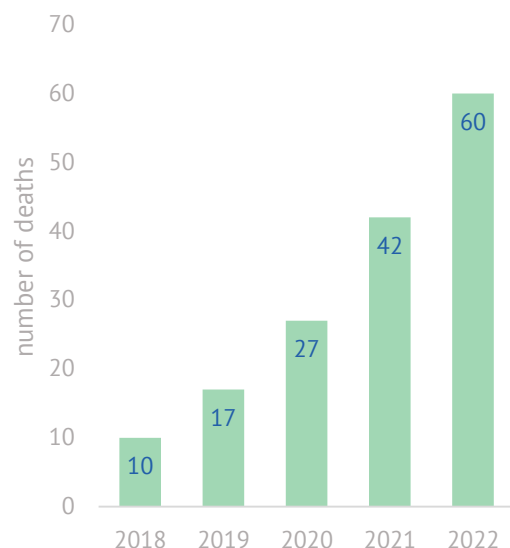
## An increasing number of fatal overdoses involve synthetic opioids.

Between 2018 and 2022 the number of synthetic opioid-involved fatal overdoses more than quadrupled, a 500% increase.

Synthetic opioids include fentanyl, tramadol, and other emerging fentanyl analogs.

Currently, data on specific synthetic opioids involved in fatal overdose in Wyoming is based on the availability of the causes of death and injury description reported in text on death certificate records. Please note that, due to differences in reporting the official causes of death, fentanyl-related death counts are subject to change or may vary from those compiled by other sources. Improvements in data collection and reporting, such as the development of new toxicology standards, may also impact these data in the future.

The number of synthetic opioid-involved fatal overdoses have been increasing at a faster rate than any other opioid type.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dea.gov/documents/2021/03/02/2020-national-drug-threat-assessment>

\*WDH Vital Statistics Services made a practice change in mid-2016 which no longer allows coroners to use the term 'unspecified narcotic' when identifying an opioid overdose. This practice change supports a decrease in overdose deaths from other unspecified narcotics starting in 2016. This practice change should be considered when evaluating changes in trends specific to opioids in Wyoming.

## Deaths involving illicitly manufactured fentanyl are on the rise.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid approved for treating severe pain. It is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.

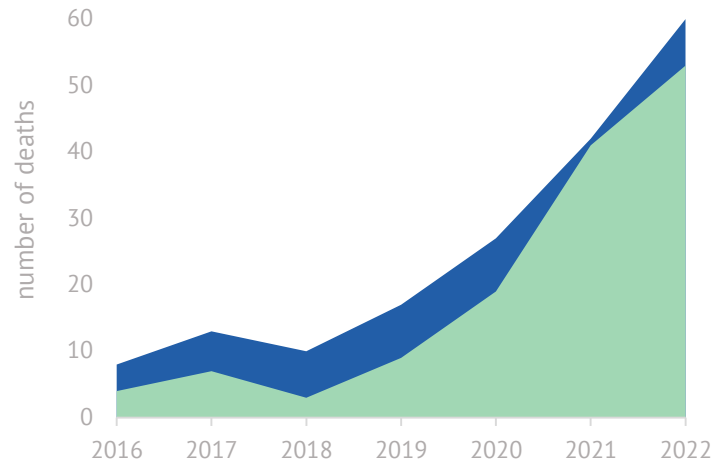
In prescription form, typically transdermal patches or lozenges, it can be diverted for misuse and abuse. However more recently, fentanyl-involved fatal overdoses have been linked to illicitly manufactured fentanyl.

Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is often mixed with other illicit drugs such as heroin or cocaine—with or without the users knowledge—to increase euphoric effects.<sup>2</sup> The presence or potency of fentanyl or its analogs is often not known to the user.

Poly-substance use is common and mixing other substances including benzodiazepines with opioids can increase the risk of overdose. Deaths may have several contributing causes of death. Overdose deaths may have more than one drug type listed and one drug type alone may not be the primary contributor to death.

In 2022 there were 60 fatal overdoses that involved synthetic opioids. Nearly three quarters (71%) also included a code for at least one other drug with abuse potential; 37% involved a stimulant, 18% involved other opioids, 8% involved benzodiazepine and 2% involved heroin.

Synthetic opioid-involved fatal overdoses increasingly include ‘fentanyl’ in the description.



## Recommended Actions

Increases in overdose deaths in recent years highlight the need to ensure people at risk of an overdose can access care, as well as expand prevention activities. Public health professionals and other community members can take the following actions based on local need<sup>2,3</sup>:

### For Public Health Professionals:

- Expand distribution and use of naloxone and overdose prevention and education strategies.
- Educate persons who use drugs, their families, and community members about the serious health risks associated with opioids, including overdose, coma, and/or death, and the increased presence of illicitly manufactured fentanyl in illicit drugs.

### For Individuals and their families:

- Learn the serious health risks associated with opioid use and the importance of using medications only as prescribed.
- Talk with a healthcare provider or pharmacist in your community about access to naloxone.
- Learn to identify and respond to an opioid overdose. Signs and symptoms in a person include<sup>4</sup>:
  - passed out and cannot be woken up
  - is not breathing or has slow shallow breathing
  - has lips that are blue or gray in color

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/fentanyl.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00438.asp>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html>

Data on fatal drug overdose for this report was obtained from the Wyoming Vital Statistics Services, Death Certificates, 2004-2022