

Substance Use Trend

Alert

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Polysubstance Use Trends Across the Nation and Florida

Using drugs in combination is known as polysubstance use.¹ Polysubstance use can enhance the high or compensate for undesired effects of one drug by taking another.² Of particular concern are polysubstance use overdoses caused by opioids in combination with other opioids and/or other non-opioid drugs,¹ as opioid-involved polysubstance use is associated with an increased risk for overdose.² Opioid-involved polysubstance use includes the combinations of two or more substances like illicit fentanyl and heroin, illicit fentanyl and cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine, and prescription or illicit opioids and benzodiazepines.¹ Moreover, polysubstance use has been associated with poorer recovery outcomes (i.e. poorer treatment retention, higher rates of relapse and higher mortality rates) compared to mono-substance use.³

Polysubstance Use in the U.S.

In the U.S., 80% of opioid-involved overdose deaths involved another substance in 2016.³ Of these deaths, 78% involved another opioid, 21% involved cocaine, 11% involved alcohol, and 5% involved a psychostimulant other than cocaine.⁴

Polysubstance Use in Florida

Polysubstance use in Florida has slowly been increasing over time with over 60% of poisoning deaths involving polysubstance use in 2018.⁵ Indications of polysubstance use deaths occurred among 92.6% of oxycodone-related deaths, 99.5% of heroin-related deaths, 94.8% of fentanyl and fentanyl analogues-related deaths, 87.9% cocaine-related deaths and 95.9% of methamphetamine-related deaths in 2019.⁶

Table 1.

Total Drug-Involved Deaths and Polysubstance Deaths, Florida, 2003-2018

Year	Any Drug Involved	Multiple Drugs Involved	% Multiple Drugs Involved
2003	6,747	3,233	47.9
2004	7,113	3,609	50.7
2005	7,544	3,826	50.7
2006	7,729	4,019	52.0
2007	8,596	4,571	53.2
2008	8,536	4,854	56.9
2009	8,642	4,996	57.8
2010	8,957	5,143	57.4
2011	8,619	4,774	55.4
2012	8,329	4,451	53.4
2013	8,226	4,263	51.8
2014	8,583	4,626	53.9
2015	9,783	5,617	57.4
2016	11,908	7,335	61.6
2017	12,436	7,861	63.2
2018	12,075	7,426	61.5

Source: FDLE MEC, Drugs in Deceased Persons Report ⁶

Recommendations

Interventions have been implemented to target mostly opioid use, misuse, and addiction.^{2,8} However, polysubstance use is present in the majority of deaths in Florida which could limit the impact of mono-substance focused interventions.^{2,8} Interventions tailored to address polysubstance misuse should be developed and implemented to reduce drug-related overdoses and deaths in Florida. Additionally, the link between mental health and substance use is profound,² suggesting policies may need to expand mental health care accessibility for those who use drugs.² For more information, please visit the following websites:

Additional Information Sources:

[Polysubstance Use and Abuse: The Unique Treatment Needs of Polydrug Users](#)

[Center for Disease and Control: Polysubstance Use and Pregnancy](#)

[Polysubstance Abuse and Addiction: Signs, Symptoms, and How to Get Help](#)

References:

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