



# Substance Use Trend *Alert*

March 2021

## Overdose Deaths Escalate during COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020.<sup>1</sup> Daily life in the United States changed dramatically with varying restrictions issued by April to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic may have had unintended consequences for substance use and overdose.<sup>2</sup> Job losses, limited social and family interactions, changes in substance use disorder treatment center services, and the pandemic itself provoking anxiety/depression have affected people with addiction and substance use disorder.<sup>1</sup>

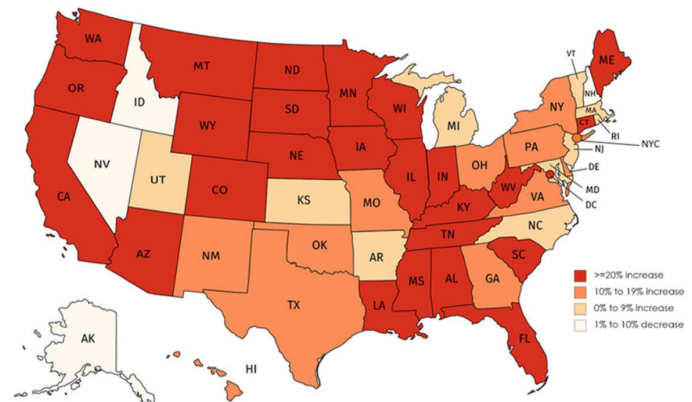
### Drug Overdoses in the U.S. during COVID-19

The pandemic may have led to an increase in drug overdose deaths.<sup>1</sup> Provisional data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recorded over 81,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States, the highest number of overdose deaths in a 12-month period, ending in May 2020.<sup>1</sup> Although overdose deaths were increasing before COVID-19 pandemic, the latest data suggest overdose deaths have escalated during the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Synthetic opioids, primarily illicit fentanyl has been the reason for increases in overdose deaths with a 38.4% increase as of May 2020 compared to data from the previous year.<sup>1</sup> July 2019 to July 2020 shows a 24.2% change increase for drug overdose deaths in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The predicted number of deaths within this same time period estimates 86,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

### Drug Overdoses in Florida during COVID-19

In Florida, predicted cases of drug overdose deaths in 2019 was 5,127 deaths but had a 38.4% increase to 7,098 provisional drug overdose deaths for the current 12-months reporting period from July 2019 to July 2020.<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 indicates states with over

20% of all fatal drug overdoses from June 2019 to May 2020 in red.<sup>3</sup> Provisional data in Florida indicates an increase in suspected non-fatal drug overdoses during the pandemic months of April through September 2020 with 25,048 non-fatal drug overdoses compared 19,191 non-fatal drug overdoses from April through September of 2019.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1:** Percent change in 12-months ending provisional data on all fatal drug overdoses. June 2019-May 2020. Source: [CDC](#)

### Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has overshadowed the access and availability of treatment and policies to combat the opioid epidemic.<sup>5</sup> The CDC suggests expanding distribution and use of naloxone and overdose prevention education, spread awareness about the access and availability of treatment for substance use disorders, intervene early with individuals who are at high risk for overdose, and improve effective response to overdose outbreaks.<sup>1</sup> For more information, please visit the following websites:

### **Additional Information Sources:**

[COVID-19 Resources for Organization Working with Persons Who Use Drugs or Have Substance Use Disorder](#)

[COVID-19 Questions and Answers: For People Who Use Drugs or Have Substance Use Disorder](#)

[I Save Florida](#)

### **References**

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5. Alexander, G. C., Stoller, K. B., Haffajee, R. L., & Saloner, B. (2020). An Epidemic in the Midst of a Pandemic: Opioid Use Disorder and COVID-19. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 173(1), 57–58.  
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