

# CDPHE Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiatives

Opioid and Other Substance Abuse  
Disorders Study Committee

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June 29, 2023



## Presenters:

- **Sam Bourdon**  
Harm Reduction Grant Fund Manager
- **Barbara Gabella**  
Injury Epidemiologist

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# Technical Assistance and Outreach

- The CDPHE Overdose Prevention Unit trains and assists community partners on fentanyl, overdose, and harm reduction.
- The CDPHE Office of STI/HIV/Viral Hepatitis offers support to syringe access programs, local public health agencies, and community partners to enhance their ability to serve people who use/inject drugs and prevent overdose/infectious diseases. We prioritize this work due to the impact of HIV, STIs, viral hepatitis, and substance use on those populations and our commitment to meeting individuals' needs wherever they seek care.

# Harm Reduction

- **Harm Reduction Grant Program** - CDPHE funds 13 projects across the state to implement evidence-based harm reduction efforts focused on ensuring that people who use drugs are able to reduce the risks associated with drug use. Funded programs include public awareness and education campaigns, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), and harm reduction services for people who use drugs.
- **Free Naloxone Distribution** - The Naloxone Bulk Purchase Fund allows eligible entities to access opiate antagonists, such as naloxone or Narcan, at no cost.

# Harm Reduction - cont.

- **Free Fentanyl Test Strip (FTS) Distribution** - 23 local public health agencies (LPHAs) participate in the program. These strips are provided at no cost to communities. CDPHE has provided approximately 90,900 FTS to LPHAs using HB22-1326 funds.
- **Syringe Access Programs** - CDPHE oversees all of Colorado's 21 syringe access programs through direct funding, supplies distribution, and/or technical assistance.

# Other Programs

- **Colorado Household Medication and Sharps Take-Back Program** - This program accepts and destroys unused and expired over-the-counter and prescription medications generated by households at 334 locations across the state. All locations accept prescribed controlled substances.
- **Workforce Initiatives** - The **Colorado Health Service Corps** program offers repayment of qualified student loans if you practice in a Health Professional Shortage Area, delivering health care services to patients who are underserved. The program currently supports 272 behavioral health clinicians in 30 counties.

# Support Toxicology Testing

- The CDPHE Coroner Mini-grant Program has helped 16 coroners' offices across the state conduct more advanced toxicology testing to determine causes of death. This data provides important information on which areas are being impacted by fentanyl overdose and allows CDPHE to also stay attuned to emerging substances in the illicit drug supply.

# Key trends in opioid overdose in Colorado

The number of **overdose deaths mentioning fentanyl** continue to increase in Colorado.

- In 2021, 912 overdose deaths involved fentanyl (48% of 1,881 overdose deaths)
- In 2022, 920 overdose deaths involved fentanyl (51% of 1,799 overdose deaths)

The age-adjusted overdose death rate involving fentanyl remained stable.

The number and rate of overdose deaths related to **prescription opioids that do not mention fentanyl** has remained low and stable.

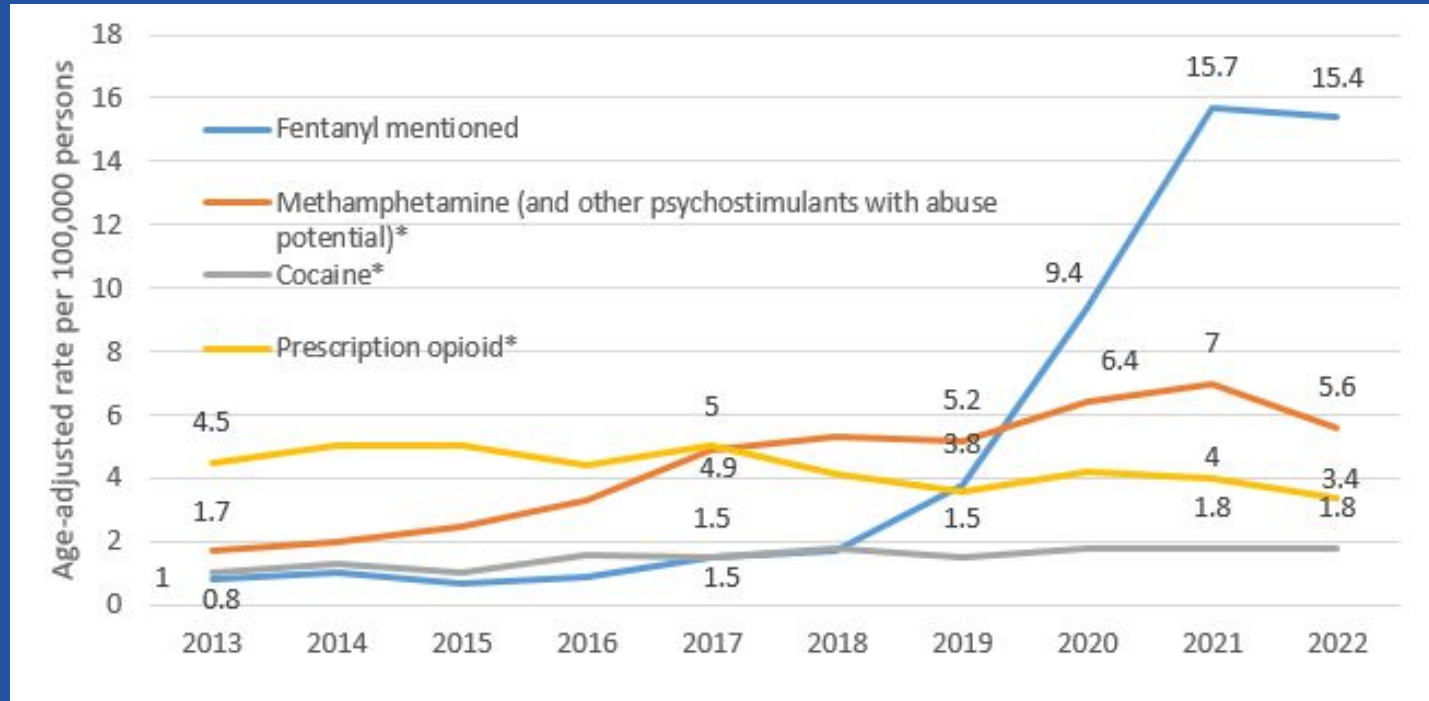
The number and rate of emergency department visits related to **nonfatal synthetic opioid overdoses** almost tripled from 2020 to 2021.

- 78% involved fentanyl



# Fentanyl death rates rose and remain high in 2022

Overdose death rates involving prescription opioids, psychostimulants, or cocaine without mention of fentanyl remained stable or decreased.

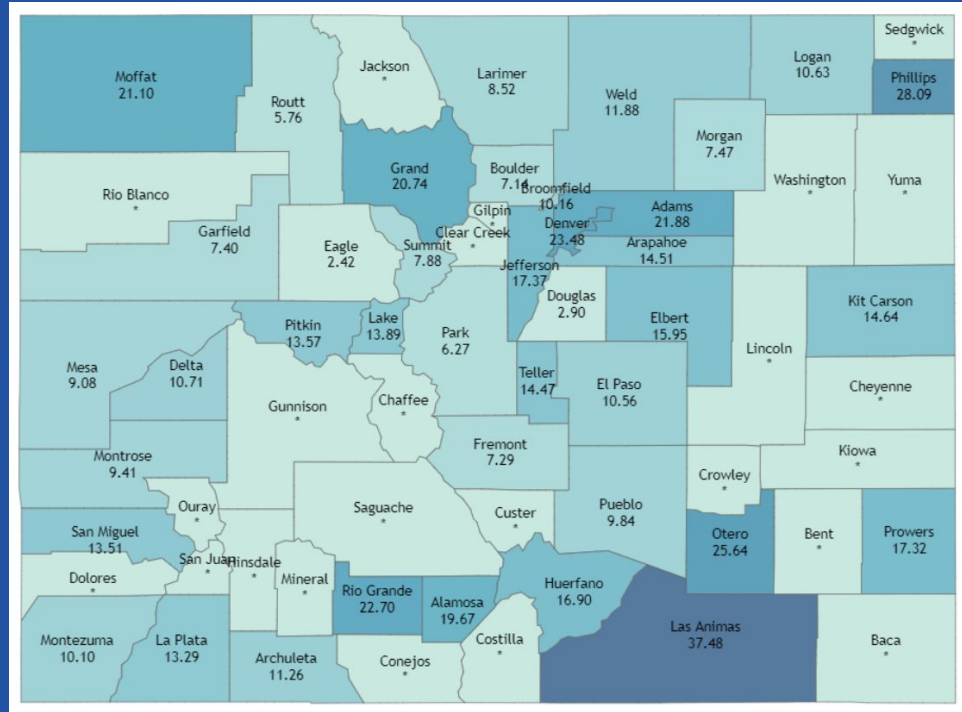


\*without fentanyl



# Key trends in opioid overdose in Colorado

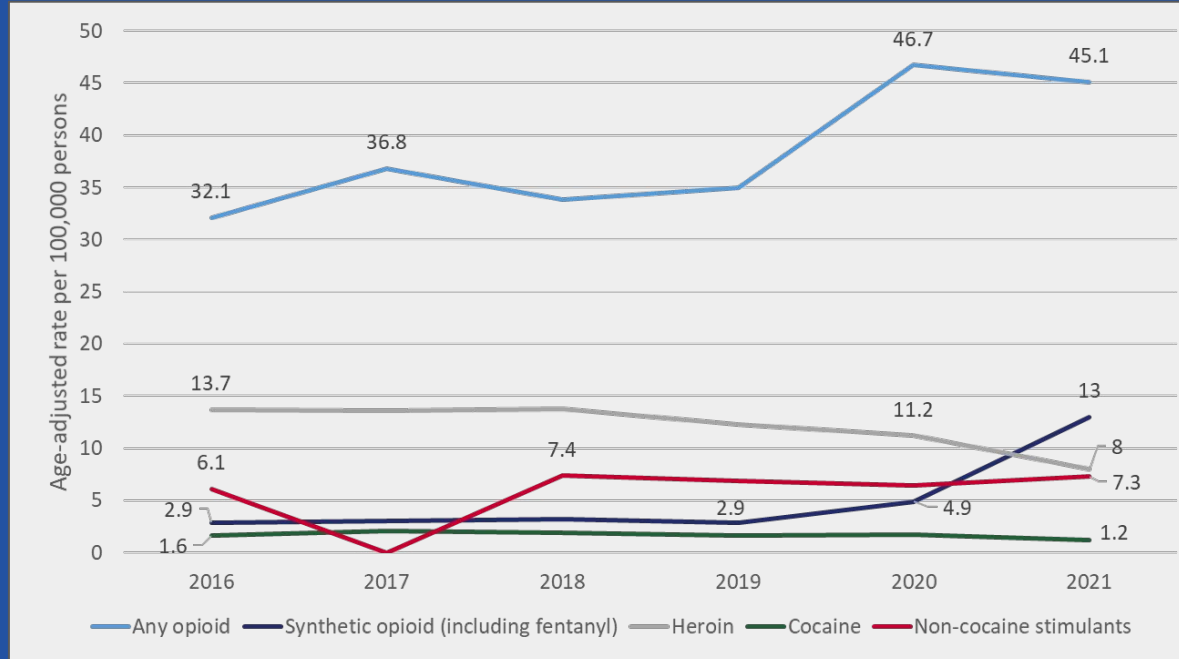
Fentanyl overdose death rates vary by county.



2020-2022 combined

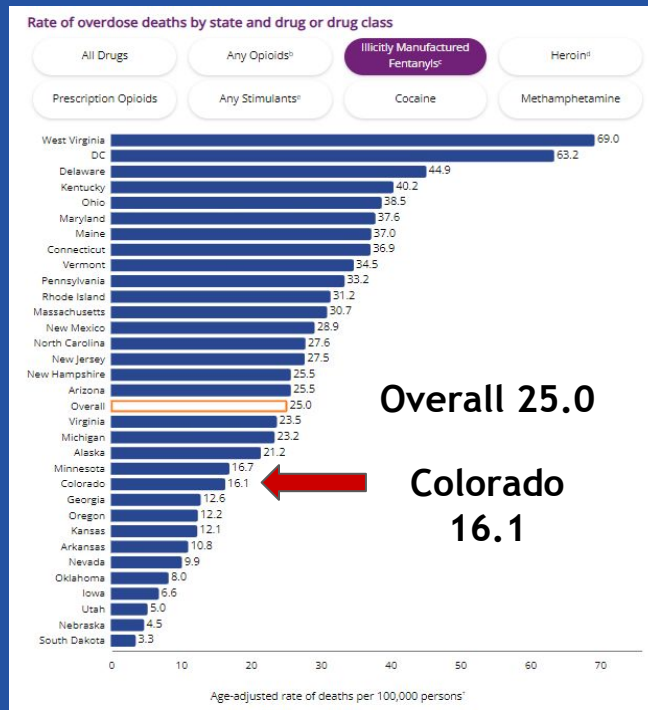
# Key trends in opioid overdose in Colorado

Rate of emergency department visits for nonfatal synthetic opioid overdoses almost tripled from 2020 to 2021 (dark blue line).



# Key trends in overdose in Colorado

47% of all overdose deaths from July 2019 - December 2021 had at least one bystander present, according to enhanced surveillance called SUDORS.

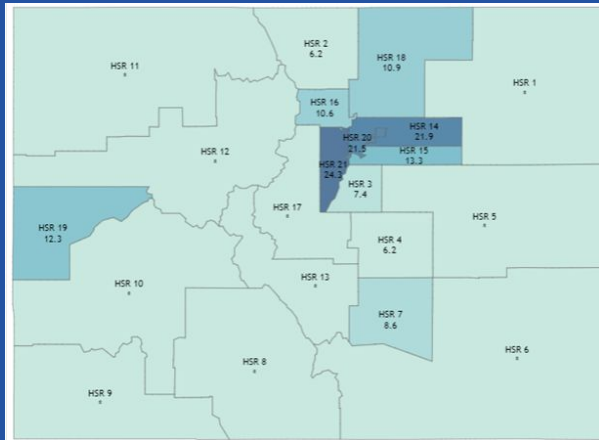


\*Source Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [SUDORS dashboard](#)

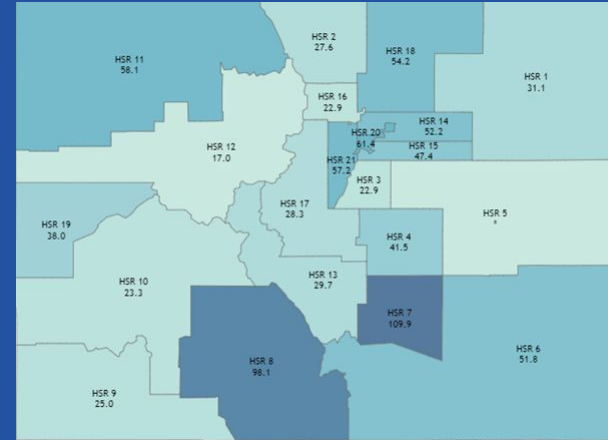


# Key trends in opioid overdose in Colorado

Rates\* of nonfatal overdoses involving synthetic opioids are higher in urban regions.



Rates\* of nonfatal overdoses involving any opioid are higher in rural regions.



\*Age-adjusted rates of overdoses among Colorado residents treated and released from Colorado emergency departments in 2021.

# Colorado Youth

- 19% of students in public high schools report it is “sort of easy” or “very easy” to get prescription drugs without a prescription.
  - 2021 Healthy Kids Colorado Survey
- 2% of youth 12-17 years old report prescription pain reliever misuse in the past year.
  - Preliminary 2021 results from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health

# Xylazine

- Non-opioid tranquilizer
- FDA-approved for use in animals
- Causes severe wounds
  - Necrotic tissue damage
- 4 associated deaths as of April 2023
- CDPHE has started a coordinating work group

# Thank You!

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CDPHE Prevention Services Division

