

## Statewide Trends in Drug Overdose: Final 2021 Data Update

**Note:** This report updates a previous preliminary report with final 2021 death certificate and hospital discharge data.

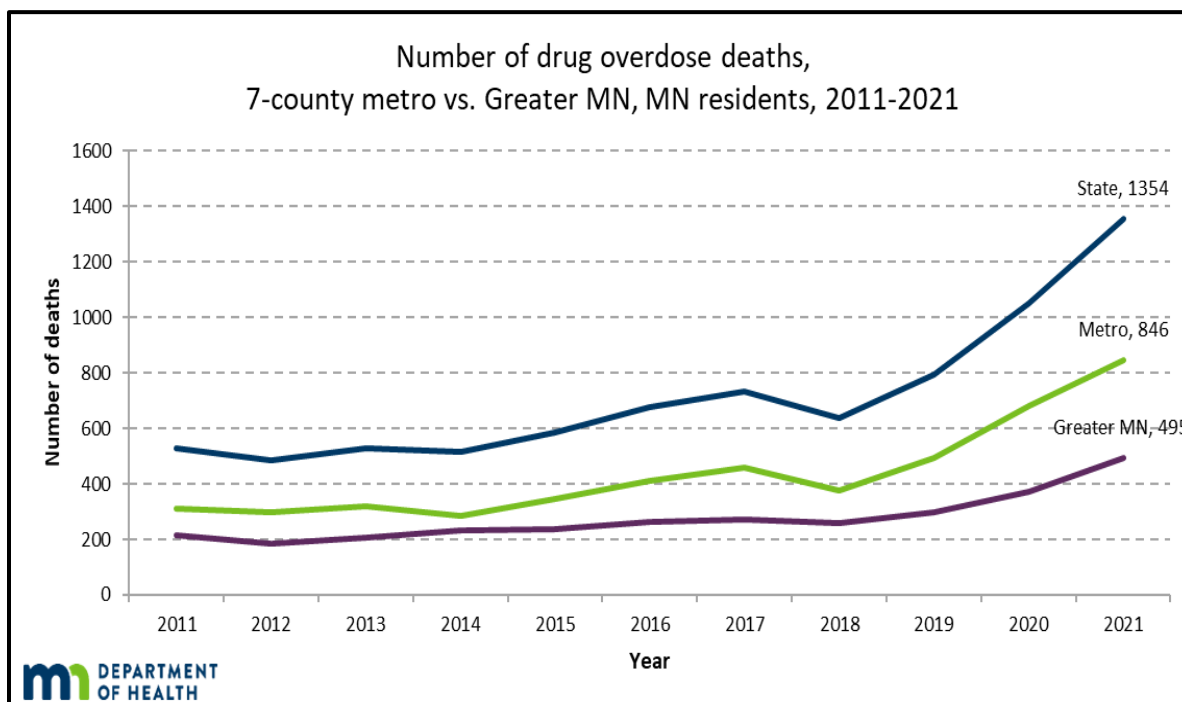
### Summary

Drug overdoses continue to affect the lives of many Minnesotans. In 2021, an average of nearly four Minnesotans died each day from a drug overdose, with the total annual number of drug overdose deaths increasing 29% from 2020. The continued increase was driven by synthetic opioids (e.g., fentanyl), psychostimulants (e.g., methamphetamine), and cocaine. Moreover, for every one drug overdose death, there were 13 nonfatal hospital-treated drug overdoses.

### Statewide drug overdose deaths

Statewide data show that drug overdose deaths increased 29% from 2020 to 2021 (1,050 to 1,354 deaths) (Figure 1). Increases in drug overdose deaths were seen in both the Seven-county Metro (the Metro) and Greater Minnesota. Although the number of deaths in the Metro remains higher, for the first time since 2014, a larger percent increase occurred in Greater Minnesota: in the Metro, drug overdose deaths increased 24% from 2020 to 2021 (680 to 846 deaths); in Greater Minnesota, drug overdose deaths increased 34% from 2020 to 2021 (370 to 495 deaths) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The number of drug overdose deaths in 2021 was the highest annual number ever recorded in Minnesota.**



SOURCE: Minnesota death certificates, Injury and Violence Prevention Section, Minnesota Department of Health, 2011-2021

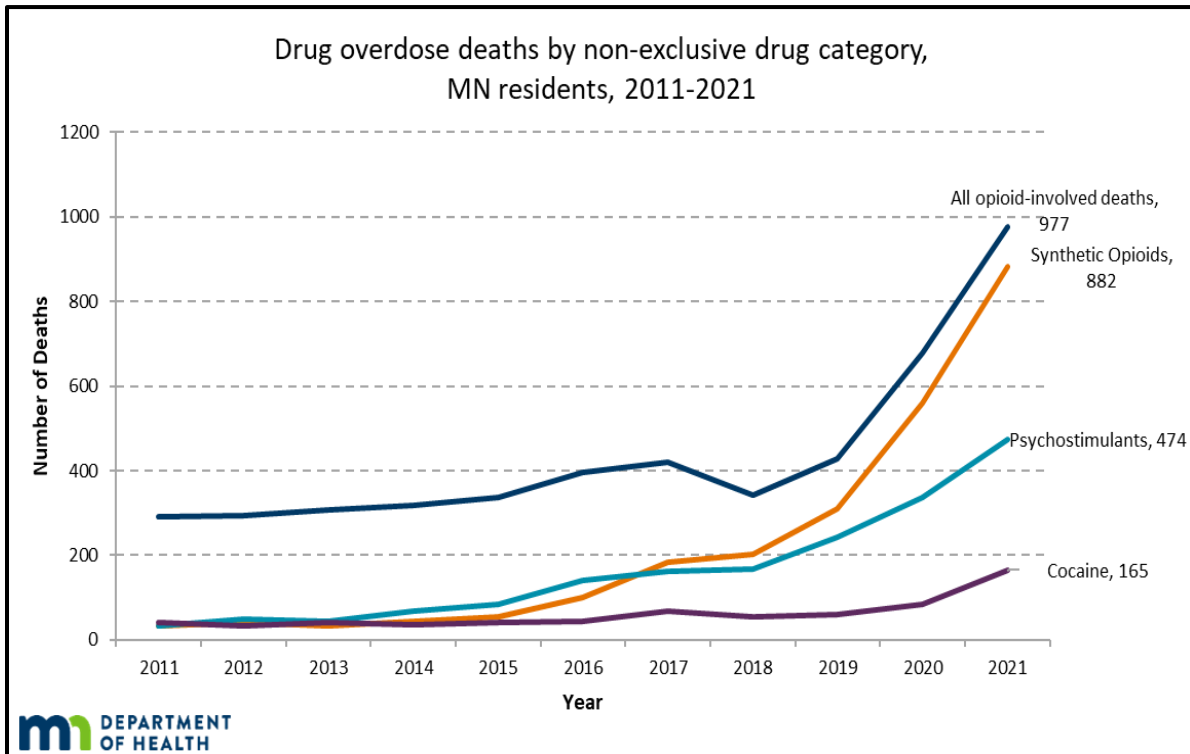
## Opioid-involved overdose deaths

Statewide 2021 data show a 43% increase from 2020 for all opioid-involved deaths (685 to 977 deaths). Deaths involving synthetic opioids, including fentanyl and fentanyl analogues, increased 57% (560 to 882 deaths), and were involved in 90% of all opioid-involved deaths (Figure 2). Deaths involving commonly prescribed opioids (i.e., other opioids and methadone) decreased 6% (221 to 207 deaths); deaths involving heroin also decreased 16% (122 to 103 deaths) (data not shown).

## Non-opioid overdose deaths

Statewide 2021 data show large increases from 2020 for deaths that involved stimulants. Cocaine-involved deaths increased 94% (85 to 165 deaths), and psychostimulant-involved deaths, which includes methamphetamine, increased 40% (338 to 474 deaths) during this period (Figure 2). Deaths involving benzodiazepines decreased 17% (144 to 119 deaths) (data not shown).

**Figure 2: There was a large increase in overdose deaths, driven by synthetic opioids, psychostimulants, and cocaine.**



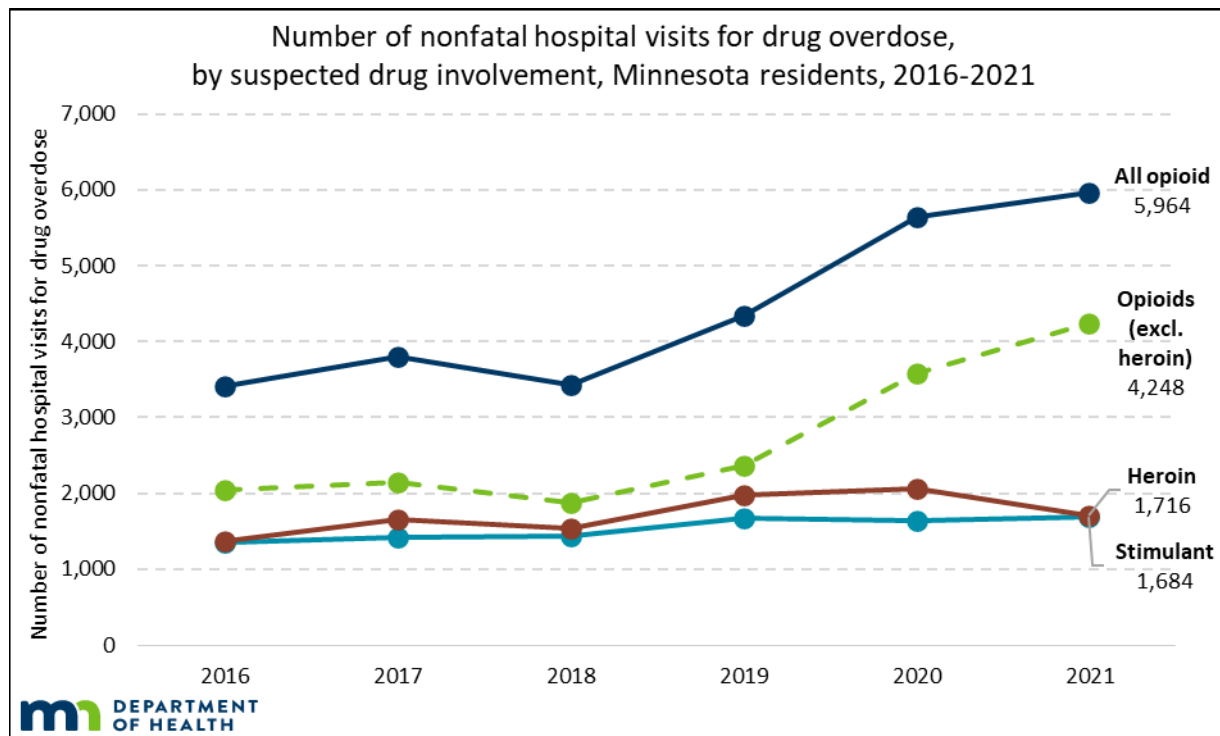
SOURCE: Minnesota death certificates, Injury and Violence Prevention Section, Minnesota Department of Health, 2011-2021.  
NOTE: Drug categories are non-exclusive.

## Nonfatal drug overdose

In 2021, for every one drug overdose death, there were 13 nonfatal hospital-treated overdoses. Most nonfatal overdoses were treated in the emergency department (67%) and were of unintentional (i.e., accidental) or undetermined intent (65%). The number of hospital-treated nonfatal overdoses slightly increased from 2020 to 2021 (6% increase; 16,783 to 17,781 overdoses). Nonfatal overdoses increased 5% in the Metro (10,226 to 10,719 overdoses), a smaller increase than Greater Minnesota, which saw an 8% increase (6,556 to 7,058 overdoses).

Nonfatal overdoses involving at least one opioid increased 6% (5,644 to 5,964 overdoses). Despite this relatively small increase in nonfatal overdoses involving at least one opioid, there was a substantial increase in the number of nonfatal overdoses involving an opioid other than heroin (e.g., synthetic opioids, commonly prescribed opioids) (18% increase; 3,589 to 4,248 overdoses). Nonfatal overdoses involving heroin decreased 16% (2,055 to 1,716 overdoses). Nonfatal overdoses involving at least one stimulant, including psychostimulants and cocaine, remained relatively stable (1,638 to 1,684 overdoses).

**Figure 3. The number of nonfatal hospital visits for drug overdoses that involved an opioid other than heroin substantially increased.**



SOURCE: Minnesota hospital discharge data, Injury and Violence Prevention Section, Minnesota Department of Health, 2016-2021.

NOTES: The above data includes nonfatal drug overdoses of all intents (i.e., unintentional, intentional, undetermined).

Drugs suspected to be involved in hospital visits are often self-reported by the patient or determined by presenting symptoms at the hospital. Toxicology testing is not usually performed to determine the specific substances involved. Drug category-specific findings should be interpreted with caution.

## Suggested citation

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