

Statewide Trends in Drug Overdose: Preliminary 2021 Update

NOTE: This report includes preliminary 2021 death certificate and hospital discharge data. The results throughout the report are indicative, not definitive, of the final 2021 data for drug overdose deaths and hospital-treated nonfatal drug overdose.

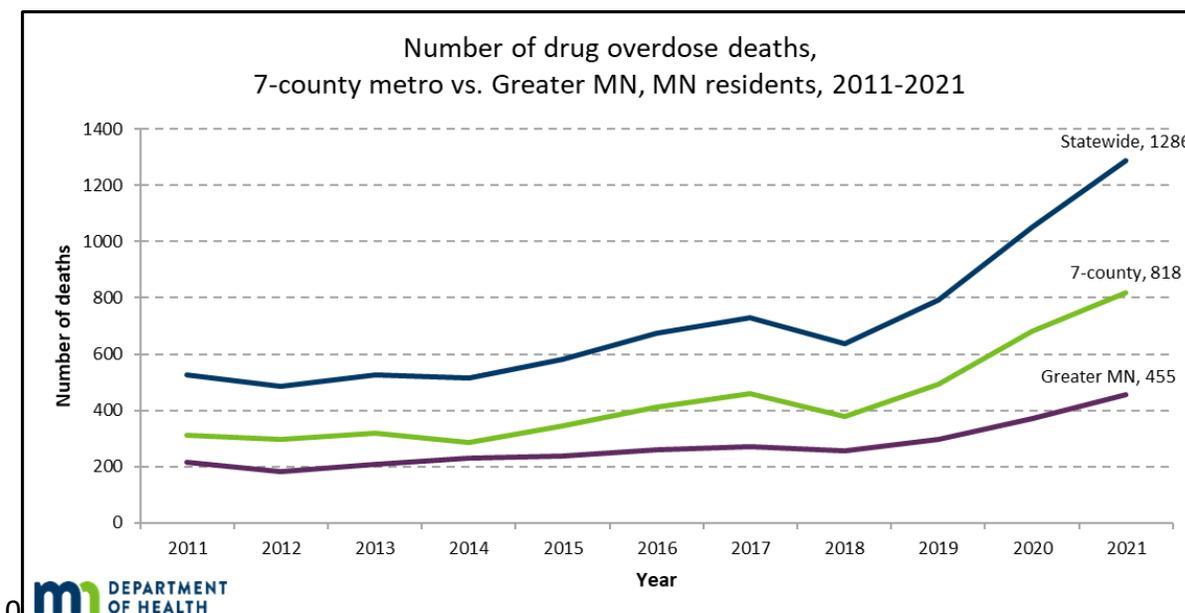
Summary

Drug overdose continues to affect the lives of many Minnesotans. In 2021, an average of four Minnesotans died each day from a drug overdose, with the total annual number of drug overdose deaths increasing 22% increase from the previous year. The continued increase was driven by synthetic opioids (e.g., fentanyl), psychostimulants (e.g., methamphetamine), and cocaine. Moreover, for every drug overdose death, there were 10 nonfatal drug overdoses. Unlike drug overdose deaths, hospital-treated nonfatal drug overdose decreased from 2020 to 2021. The risk for a hospital-treated overdose is impacted by many factors, but the concerted effort to increase naloxone awareness and availability may have resulted in more overdoses being reversed at home without a hospital visit.

Statewide drug overdose deaths

Preliminary statewide data show that drug overdose deaths increased 22% from 2020 to 2021 (1,050 to 1,286 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 20% from 2020 to 2021 (680 to 818 deaths); in Greater Minnesota, drug overdose deaths increased 23% from 2020 to 2021 (370 to 455 deaths) (Figure 1).

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



PRELIMINARY 2021 DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS

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

NOTE: 2021 data are preliminary and likely to change when finalized

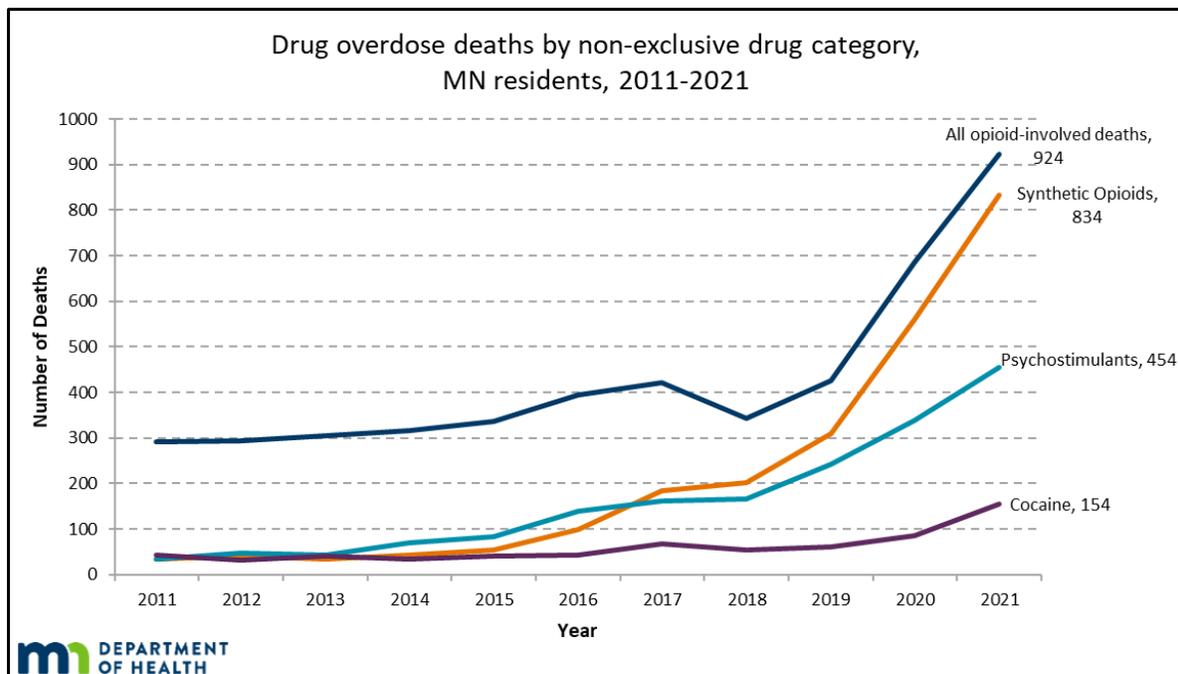
Opioid-involved overdose deaths

Preliminary 2021 data show a 35% increase from 2020 for all opioid-involved deaths (685 to 924 deaths). Deaths involving synthetic opioids, including fentanyl and fentanyl analogues, increased 49% (560 to 834 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 11% (221 to 196 deaths); deaths involving heroin also decreased 20% (122 to 97 deaths) (data not shown).

Non-opioid overdose deaths

Preliminary 2021 data also show large increases from 2020 for deaths that involved stimulants. Cocaine-involved deaths increased 81% (85 to 154 deaths), and psychostimulant-involved deaths, which includes methamphetamine, increased 34% (338 to 454 deaths) during this period (Figure 2). Deaths involving benzodiazepines decreased 19% (144 to 117 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: 2021 data are preliminary and likely to change when finalized.

NOTE: Drug categories are non-exclusive.

Nonfatal drug overdose

In 2021, for every 1 overdose death, there were 10 nonfatal overdoses. A majority (62%) of nonfatal overdoses were treated in the emergency department. Unlike the increase seen in drug overdose

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deaths, hospital-treated nonfatal overdoses decreased 10% from 2020 to 2021 (14,545 to 13,081 overdoses). Nonfatal overdose decreased 16% in the Metro (9,125 to 7,698 overdoses), a larger decrease than Greater Minnesota, which saw a more modest decrease of 6% (5,418 to 5,112 overdoses).

Nonfatal overdoses involving at least one opioid decreased 24% (5,185 to 3,950 overdoses). Nonfatal overdoses involving at least one stimulant, including psychostimulants and cocaine, decreased 11% (1,446 to 1,285 overdoses), but surpassed heroin-involved nonfatal overdose for the first time.

NOTE: Data contained within this report are preliminary and likely to change when finalized. The results throughout the report are indicative, not definitive, of the final 2021 data for drug overdose deaths and hospital-treated nonfatal overdose.

Suggested citation

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