

# Illegally Manufactured Fentanyl Driving Worsening Opioid Epidemic: CDC

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Illegally manufactured fentanyl was the driving force behind a 45.2% increase in deaths involving synthetic opioids from 2016 to 2017, according to a new report published Friday by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In all, there were 70,237 drug overdose deaths in 2017. Opioids were involved in 67.8%, or 47,600 of those deaths. Of those opioid-involved overdose deaths, 59.8% of them, or 28,466, were due to synthetic opioids.

“The opioid overdose epidemic continues to worsen and evolve because of the continuing increase in deaths involving synthetic opioids,” the authors wrote in the study.

The new report, which was published online in the CDC’s MMWR, reviewed drug overdose deaths from 2013-17. During that time, “drug overdose death rates increased in 35 of 50 states and DC, and significant increases in death rates involving synthetic opioids occurred in 15 of 20 states,” the CDC said in a statement noting that the increase was likely driven by illegally manufactured fentanyl.

A separate report from the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics released earlier this month found that in 2016 fentanyl surpassed heroin as the most commonly used drug in overdose deaths in the US.

The new report released Friday also compared demographic and geographic data from 2016-17.

It found West Virginia, Ohio and New Hampshire were the states with the highest number of synthetic opioid-involved overdose deaths in 2017.

But the study found that 23 states and Washington, DC experienced “significant increases” in

synthetic opioid-involved overdose death rates. These states are no longer concentrated east of the Mississippi River. Eight states west of the Mississippi experienced “significant increases” of synthetic opioid-related deaths. Those states were Arizona, California, Colorado, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Texas and Washington.

Arizona had the biggest increase, which was 122.2%, followed by North Carolina, which had a 112.9% increase in deaths, and Oregon, which had a 90.9% increase in synthetic opioid overdoses.

While increases were seen in both men and women as well as non-Hispanic blacks, non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics, blacks had the largest relative change, which was 25.2%. The largest absolute rate increase was among 25- to 44-year-old men. People age 65 and older had the largest relative change among age groups, which was 17.2% from 2016-17.

And while the number of deaths from synthetic opioids climbed, overdose deaths from prescription opioids and heroin remained stable in 2016-17. Overdose deaths from cocaine increased more than 34%, and the rate of overdose deaths from psychostimulants increased more than 33%, the report found.

“Through 2017, the drug overdose epidemic continues to worsen and evolve, and the involvement of many types of drugs (e.g., opioids, cocaine, and methamphetamine) underscores the urgency to obtain more timely and local data to inform public health and public safety action,” the authors of the report said.

But the authors do give the possibility of hope: “Provisional data from 2018 indicate potential improvements in some drug overdose indicators; however, analysis of final data from 2018 is necessary for confirmation.”

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