



Health Alert Network Message 21-74: Louisiana Department of Health Reporting Surge of Fatal Drug Overdoses

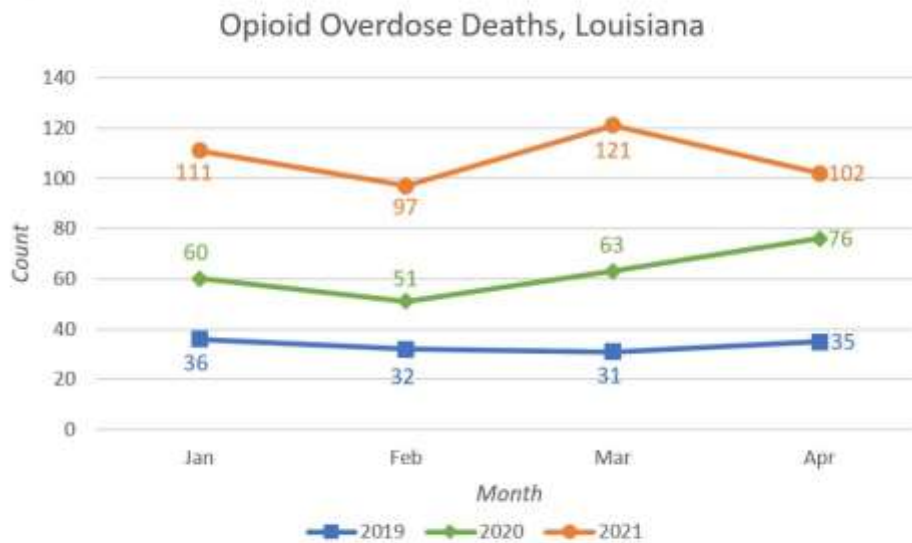
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Louisiana Department of Health Reporting Surge of Fatal Drug Overdoses

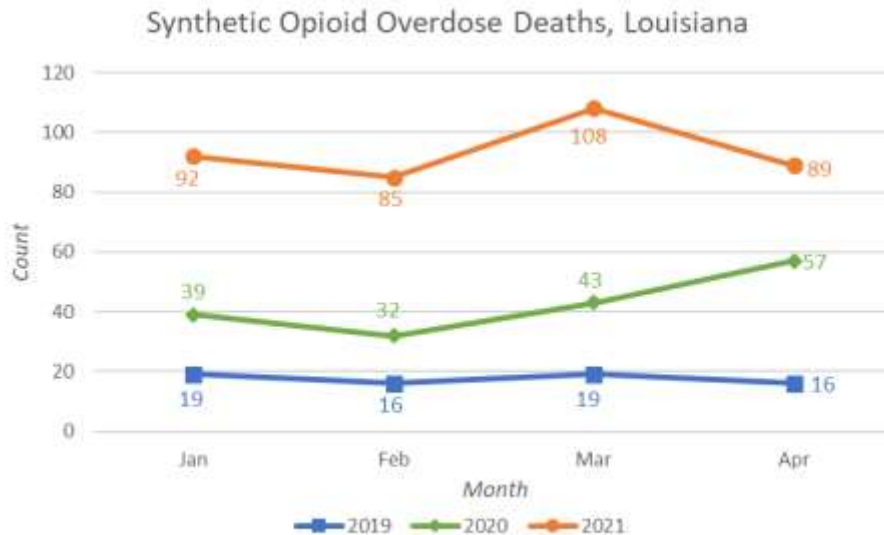
The Louisiana Opioid Surveillance Program (LOSP) is tracking an increase in drug overdose deaths occurring in Louisiana largely due to a surge in the presence of illicitly manufactured fentanyl. Fentanyl is 80 to 100 times more potent than morphine and extremely deadly. Varying amounts of fentanyl and fentanyl-related compounds have been found in counterfeit pills and other illicit drugs, increasing the risk of fatal and non-fatal overdoses. The increase in the supply and distribution of illicitly manufactured fentanyl has caused a steady increase in overdose deaths since 2014 that spiked in 2020 and continued into 2021.

LOSP collects data on fatal drug overdoses from coroners, drug seizures, and toxicology testing results. LOSP analyzed fatal overdose deaths in Louisiana occurring between January and April 2021, and compared those data with fatal overdose deaths occurring in the same months in 2020 and 2019. For deaths involving opioids of all types, the total count for January to April 2021 is 72% higher than the same period in 2020.



Source: Louisiana Electronic Event Registration System, extracted 10/2021 by the Louisiana Opioid Surveillance Initiative.
**2021 data are preliminary.

The total number of synthetic opioid (mostly fentanyl) deaths is 119% higher for the four-month period in 2021 than in 2020. Additionally, total synthetic opioid overdose deaths occurring between January and April 2021 (374) is higher than the total number of synthetic overdose deaths occurring in all of 2019 (314).



Source: Louisiana Electronic Event Registration System, extracted 10/2021 by the Louisiana Opioid Surveillance Initiative.
 **2021 data are preliminary and do not represent the final count for 2020 overdose deaths.

In September 2021, the Drug Enforcement Administration issued its first [Public Safety Alert](#) in six years, warning Americans of the increase in availability of fake prescription pills containing lethal doses of illicit fentanyl. These counterfeit pills are typically round, blue tablets that are made to look like real medication and sold as oxycodone, Percocet, or Xanax. Though they closely resemble prescription medication, one pill can contain more than twice the lethal limit of fentanyl per tablet.

Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is available on the drug market in different forms, including liquid, powder, patches, tablets, and sprays. Due to the low cost and increased availability, powdered fentanyl has become a common ingredient in all illicit drugs, including heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and ecstasy. Powdered fentanyl is traditionally mixed into heroin or sold as heroin, often without the knowledge of persons who use drugs (PWUD). This leads to an increased risk of fentanyl-involved overdoses among PWUD, whether they consume diverted pills, inject, sniff, or snort drugs. Without the use of fentanyl test strips, it is nearly impossible for PWUD to detect fentanyl, as it cannot be smelled or tasted and looks like any other powder.

In this environment, LDH strongly recommends that individuals using drugs, their friends, and their families, should have naloxone readily available.

Naloxone, commonly purchased as Narcan nasal spray, is life-saving medicine that can reverse an overdose by restoring normal breathing to a person experiencing opioid-induced respiratory depression. Naloxone is not harmful to anyone not overdosing. The Louisiana Department of Health has issued the [Naloxone Standing Order](#), providing every individual in Louisiana with a prescription for the overdose reversal medication, which is available for purchase through most pharmacies and is covered by Louisiana Medicaid plans. Pharmacies will also provide information on how and when to administer this medicine.

It is important for everyone to recognize the signs of an opioid overdose. These include

1. Slow, shallow breathing or no breathing at all
2. Falling asleep or loss of consciousness

3. Choking, gurgling, or snoring sounds
4. Small, constricted “pinpoint pupils”
5. Limp body
6. Pale, blue, or cold skin

Call 911 if any of these signs or symptoms of an opioid overdose are observed.

LDH has multiple resources and services available to individuals with substance use disorders and their loved ones.

- Ten local governing entities (LGEs), also called human services districts/authorities, provide statewide prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery services. Location and contact information for these LGEs is available at www.opioidhelpla.org.
 - Local community agencies can request naloxone from their LGE.
- Individuals who are experiencing challenges with opioids and other drugs have access to ten distinct Opioid Treatment Programs (OTPs), also located geographically across the state, that provide more intensive treatment and recovery help through medication-assisted treatment.
 - [List of Opioid Treatment Providers](#)
 - [Medication-assisted treatment clinics and providers](#)
- Buprenorphine is an additional medication-assisted treatment available from practitioners throughout the state. SAMHSA maintains a [comprehensive locator for buprenorphine treatment](#).
- Information can also be provided over the phone by calling the Office of Behavioral Health helpline at 1-877-664-2248 or reaching out to a crisis counselor at 1-866-310-7977.
- Prevention information and referrals to treatment resources are also available through Louisiana 2-1-1. Individuals can call 211 for non-emergency help or text the word “opioid” to 898211. Teens in crisis or who need help can text 833-898-8336.
- Syringe service programs are available in some parishes in Louisiana. These programs offer sterile syringes and supplies, HIV and HCV testing, linkages to addiction treatment and other care, and other support services.
 - [New Orleans and Baton Rouge locations](#)
 - [Shreveport location](#)
 - [Alexandria location](#)