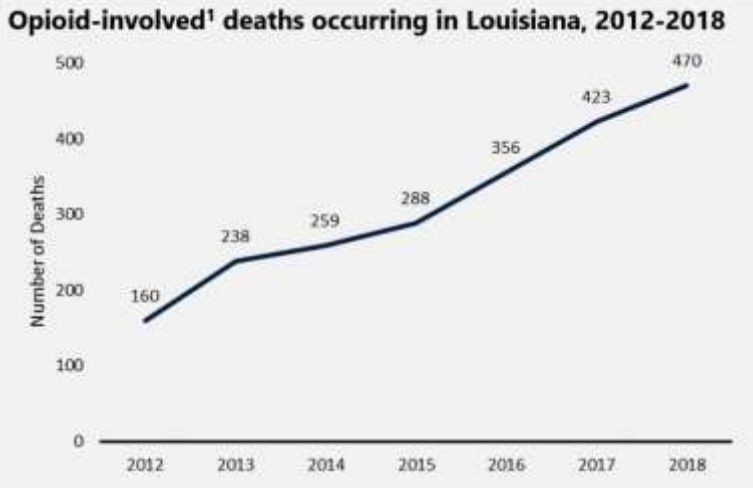
OPIOID-INVOLVED DEATHS IN LOUISIANA

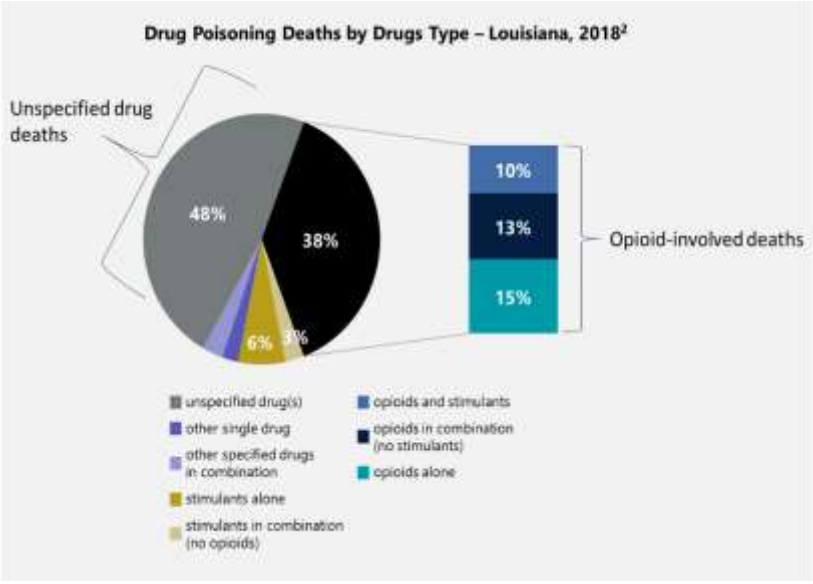
Updated November 2019

All deaths occurring in Louisiana are reported to the Office of the State Registrar and Vital Records. Parish coroners investigate any deaths where drugs were involved to determine cause of death.

The deaths in this fact sheet represent opioid poisoning (overdose) deaths and opioid-involved deaths (other deaths with opioids marked as present in the death record) occurring in the state of Louisiana. Louisiana residents and non-residents are included in this number. Opioid-involved deaths include opioid poisonings, and other deaths that are not marked as drug poisonings but where coroners determined that opioids contributed to the death. Only deaths that specifically mention opioids in the death certificate are factored into the "opioid-involved" category shown in this factsheet. The number of opioid-involved deaths in Louisiana was 184% times higher in 2018 than in 2012.



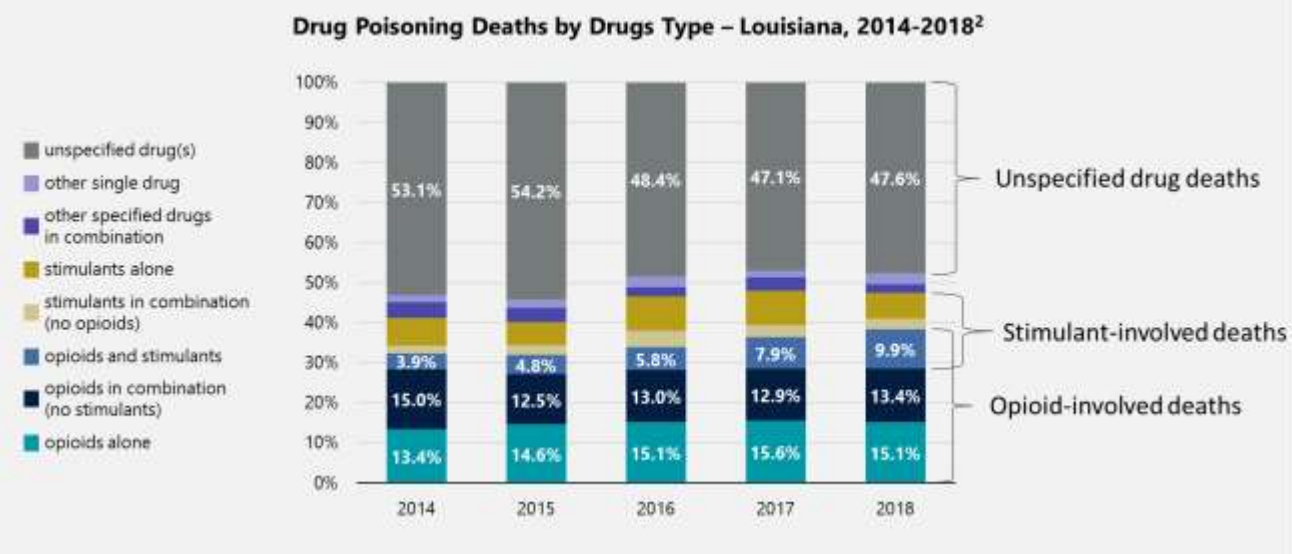
Accurately counting overdose deaths due to a specific drug is a challenge due to the nature of drug overdoses, the frequency of poly-substance overdose deaths, and variation in cause of death determination across jurisdictions. Parish coroners operate independently from one another, there can be variations in the way deaths are classified across parishes. For example, one death may be classified as a fentanyl overdose in one parish, but a similar death in another parish may be classified as "anoxic brain injury secondary to fentanyl."



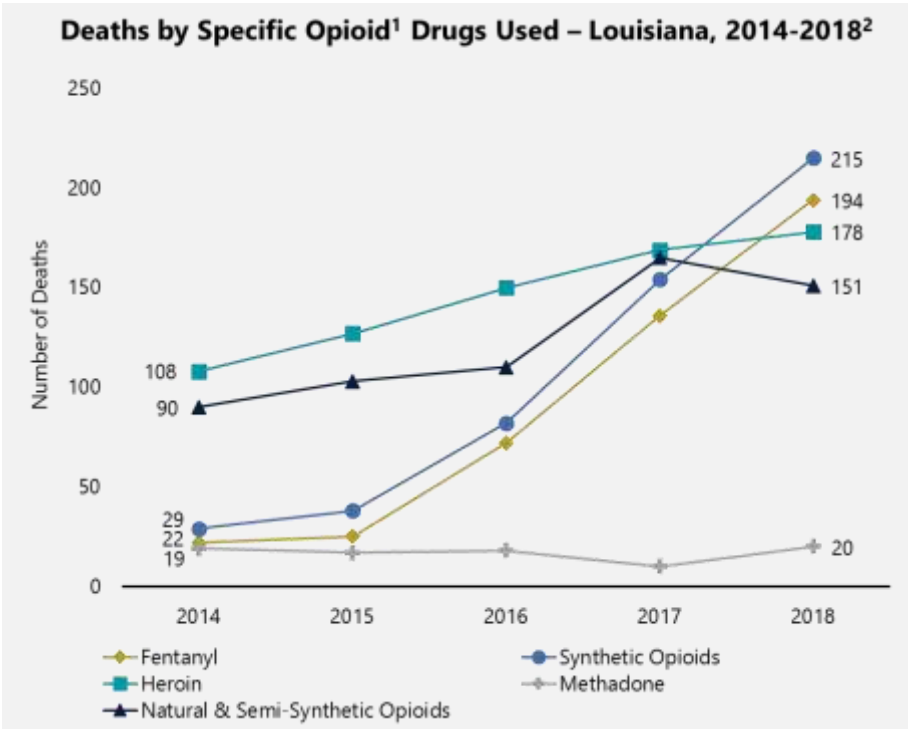
Another challenge to determining the number of opioid-involved deaths is that multiple drugs are often found in the decedent's system. These are classified as "multi-drug toxicity," "poly drug overdose," "multiple drug overdose," etc. In cases where multiple drugs were present in toxicology tests, it can be difficult to determine which drug caused the death. Many cases have toxicology results that reveal drugs of all types (prescription, over-the-counter, illicit) which were deadly in combination, like opioids and benzodiazepines. In those cases, the combination of the drugs may have contributed collectively to the overdose death. The Louisiana Opioid Surveillance Initiative analyzes laboratory toxicology results to clarify the involvement of opioids in multi-drug deaths and deaths in which specific drugs are not documented.

[1]ICD-10 codes for opioids: Heroin (T40.1); Opioid Analgesic (T40.2 – T40.4)
Data source: Louisiana Electronic Event Registration System, Bureau of Vital Records

In 2018, 38% of drug poisoning deaths contained an opioid-involved code in the death record. Nineteen percent of drug poisoning deaths involved a stimulant. Opioids and stimulants together were found in 10% of drug poisoning deaths. Almost 48% of drug deaths did not contain any specific drug codes in their records.



The percentage of drug poisoning death records that do not contain any specified drug codes has decreased over the last five years from 53% to 47.6%. This is likely due to increased awareness among coroners of the need to specify the drugs involved in multi-drug deaths. Opioid poisoning deaths have made up the largest number of specified drug poisoning deaths for the last 5 years. More than 38% of drug poisoning deaths in 2018 involved opioids, an increase from 32% in 2014.



Stimulant poisoning deaths make up the second largest type of specified drug deaths. Stimulant poisoning deaths have increased from 13% of drug poisoning deaths in 2014 to 19% in 2018.

The graph to the left shows the trends of deaths involving several types of opioids (including heroin, fentanyl, and methadone). Deaths involving heroin show a steady increase, but deaths involving synthetic opioids (including fentanyl) have rapidly increased. Deaths involving fentanyl have increased by almost 800% since 2014.

The key take away from these updated numbers is that the number of opioid and drug involved deaths has marginally increased, but more importantly, the composition of the drug types involved in these deaths have changed drastically.

[1]ICD-10 codes for opioids: Heroin (T40.1); Opioid Analgesic (T40.2 – T40.4)
[2]2018 data are preliminary
Data source: Louisiana Electronic Event Registration System, Bureau of Vital Records