

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: The Opioid Surge**

According to a recent article in The Washington Post, two years ago, when opioid-related fatalities overtook homicides as the District's leading cause of preventable deaths, 2020 will end as the deadliest year yet in the city's opioid crisis, mirroring a surge of overdoses nationally. Officials recorded 282 fatal overdoses in the nation's capital by the end of August, according to the most recent statistics, one more than in all of 2019. April, with nearly 50 fatalities, was the deadliest month of the epidemic in five years.

Advocates and health officials say the continued rise of the potent additive fentanyl is one reason the city has been unable to stem the tide, along with the isolation and despair caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Critics of the city's efforts say the government must do far more to connect addicts with treatment and prevention programs. D.C. lawmakers recently approved several opioid-related measures, including expanding the ranks of city employees carrying overdose antidotes and broadening "good Samaritan" laws to protect other drug users from prosecution if they report or attempt to reverse an overdose. The council also voted to decriminalize drug paraphernalia, an attempt to treat addiction as a public health problem instead of a criminal justice issue.

Some of the legislation was drafted in response to a 2018 Washington Post investigation that found city agencies had responded slowly to the spike in fatalities in recent years, particularly among older Black men who had used heroin with relative safety for decades before the arrival of fentanyl. Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services maintains the record number of overdoses can be attributed to the local drug supply becoming more potent and to more people using drugs alone at home during the pandemic — without anyone to report an overdose. Health officials have been instructed to reevaluate their strategy for preventing deaths via prevention, intervention, education and referral to treatment.

Washington is not alone in confronting a rise of opioid deaths; more than 40 states have reported an increase in fatalities this year. Experts note that the pandemic has caused the cancellation of in-person recovery meetings and prompted health officials to urge people to limit close contact with others. But in Washington and nationally, the spike in overdose fatalities began before the first wave of shutdowns and stay-at-home orders in March.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that about 19,000 people died of a drug overdose — including non-opioids — in the first three months of this year, a 16 percent year-over-year increase. Advocates say this year's death toll may have been even worse without these measures. D.C. police administered naloxone at least 581 times through September, data shows, compared with 482 times in 2019, when police first started carrying the antidote. The legislation pending before the mayor requires city health workers — including those who work with people who are homeless or have mental health disorders — to have access to naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan. Lawmakers also approved granting criminal immunity to people reporting drug overdoses, even if they were also using, and to those who attempt to administer naloxone as some drug users were afraid to call 911 or seek help out of fear that they will be prosecuted.

The Washington Post is a major American daily newspaper published in Washington, D.C. It has taken a leadership role in following the Nations opioid epidemic. Please visit The Post's Opioid Files for more information at [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled. "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).