

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Drug Overdose Deaths Continue Decline in 2024

Drug overdose deaths in the United States experienced a significant decline in 2024, with preliminary data indicating a drop of roughly 25% to 27% compared to the previous year. This marks one of the largest single-year declines ever recorded, driven by a combination of public health initiatives, changes in the illicit drug supply, and, in some cases, the tragic "saturation" of the drug crisis.

According to the recently released annual report on drug overdose deaths by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2024, there were 79,385 drug overdose deaths, an age-adjusted rate of 23.1 deaths per 100,000 standard population. The largest decrease occurring between 2023-2024 — 26.2%.

Between 2023 and 2024, the overdose death rate:

Declined for all age groups. Younger age groups had the largest decreases, with rates declining 37% among those 15-24. Adults 65+ had the smallest rate decrease. In 2023 and 2024, the overdose death rate was highest for adults 35-44 and lowest for those 15-24.

Declined for each race and Hispanic-origin group. The rate decreased most (30.9%) for Black non-Hispanic people. In both 2023 and 2024, the rate was highest for American Indian/Alaska Native non-Hispanic people and lowest for Asian non-Hispanic people.

Decreased for each opioid type category. Deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone (mostly fentanyl) decreased the most (35.6%). There was a 20.7% decrease in overdose deaths involving natural and semisynthetic opioids (prescription opioids), heroin death rates decreased 33.3%, and methadone overdose death rates decreased by 10%.

Decreased for overdoses involving stimulants. The death rate decreased 19.8% for overdose deaths involving psychostimulants with abuse potential (mostly methamphetamine) and 26.7% for those involving cocaine.

Public health researchers attribute this successful downward trend to the following key factors:

1. Widespread Access to Naloxone and Harm Reduction

- **Naloxone (Narcan) Availability:** The massive, widespread distribution of naloxone, the opioid overdose-reversal medication—has been a major factor. It is now more accessible over the counter and often carried by people who use drugs, saving thousands of lives.
- **Fentanyl Test Strips:** Increased use of fentanyl test strips has helped users identify, and avoid, high-potency drugs.
- **Good Samaritan Laws:** Increased adoption of laws that encourage bystanders to call for help during an overdose without fear of prosecution.

2. Shifts in the Illicit Drug Market

- **Lowered Fentanyl Potency:** Academic analysis of drug seizures and user reports indicates a potential decline in the purity and, consequently, the lethal potency of street fentanyl in 2023 and 2024.
- **Xylazine Presence:** The increase of animal tranquilizers like xylazine in the fentanyl supply has paradoxically reduced deaths in some cases. While highly toxic, xylazine is not an opioid and does not cause fatal respiratory arrest in the same way as pure fentanyl.
- **Supply Chain Disruption:** Enhanced international, federal, and local law enforcement efforts to disrupt the flow of fentanyl, particularly from Mexico and China.

3. Public Health Interventions and Treatment Access

- **Expansion of Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD):** Access to treatments like methadone and buprenorphine has increased, including the elimination of the "X-waiver" requirement for prescribing buprenorphine.
- **Opioid Settlement Funds:** The use of billions of dollars from lawsuit settlements with pharmaceutical companies to fund addiction services, outreach, and recovery centers.
- **Reduction in New Users:** Research suggests a decrease in the number of young people starting to use highly dangerous substances like fentanyl.

4. Behavioral Changes and "Saturation"

- **Safer Use Practices:** Due to the extreme danger of the supply, some users have adopted safer methods, such as smoking instead of injecting, not using alone, and using smaller doses to test strength.

- **Shrinking Vulnerable Population:** Tragically, experts suggest that after years of record-high deaths, a significant portion of the most vulnerable, high-risk individuals have already died, leaving a smaller population at immediate risk of fatal overdose.

Despite this progress, overdose deaths remain exceptionally high, and experts warn that these gains are fragile, potentially threatened by future funding cuts to treatment and public health programs.

Health care providers and prevention organizations need to continue to improve substance use education and awareness by educating the public on how to recognize the signs of an overdose and how to administer naloxone, utilizing state-run prescription drug monitoring programs to prevent the misuse of prescription opioids and address root causes and stigma associated with addiction, which often hinders people from seeking help. Addressing social determinants like housing instability and mental health is also crucial for long-term reduction.

SAFE, Inc. is the only alcohol and substance abuse prevention, intervention and education agency in the City of Glen Cove. Its Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," to educate and update the community regarding prescription and illicit drug use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org.