



Drug Overdose Alert for December 2022

Dear Community Providers,

The following is to notify you that confirmed accidental and undetermined overdoses in Pima County have surpassed the alert threshold for the month of December 2022.

Methods

The Health Department's Community Mental Health and Addiction (CMHA) unit conducts routine surveillance of local overdose trends. Surveillance looks at specific data sets to monitor and record trends of critical public health indicators commonly associated with substance use. The CMHA team uses a six-month moving average to set thresholds for issuing health alerts. The alert indicator is set at two standard deviations above the six-month rolling average. This alert indicator allows for standardized methodology for the team to issue alerts when local fatal overdose trends reach higher than expected totals.

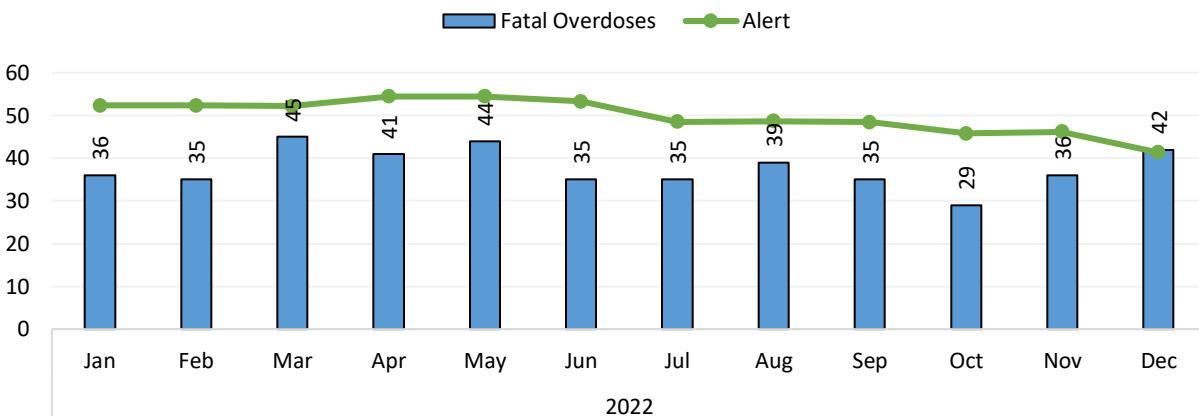
Mortality Data

Data from Arizona Department of Health Services' Vital Records and Pima County's Office of the Medical Examiner are used in this alert. There is an inherent data lag due to the death certification process and the required time to complete the medical examination. Given these two factors, this report is limited to information available at the time the report was completed. Only overdoses with manner of accident or undetermined are included in this report. Intentional overdoses (suicides) are not included in this report. From here on, the term "overdoses" only includes accidental or undetermined deaths.

Alert

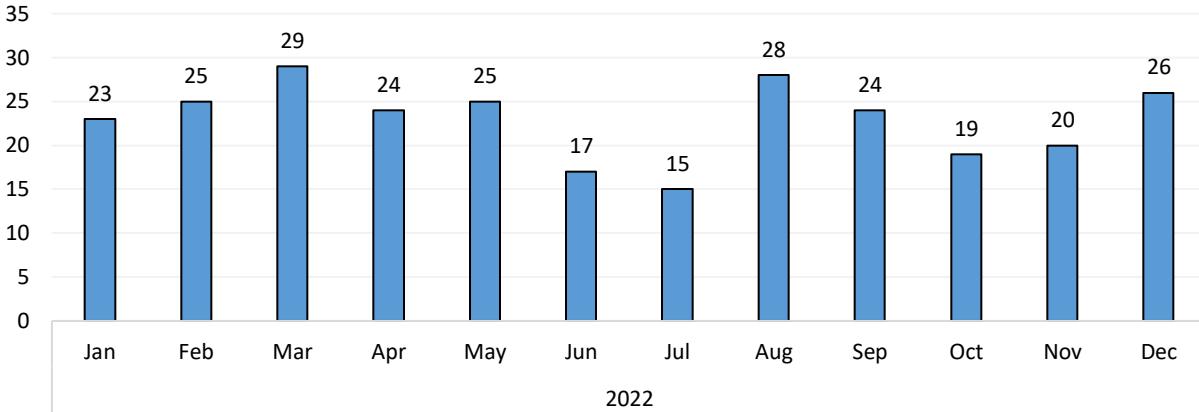
A point in time count on January 24, 2023, confirmed 42 fatal overdoses in Pima County during the month of December 2022 exceeding the alert threshold for the month (*Figure 1*). Please be advised, counts are preliminary, as some cases may still be pending.

Figure 1. Fatal Overdoses by Month with Alert Level



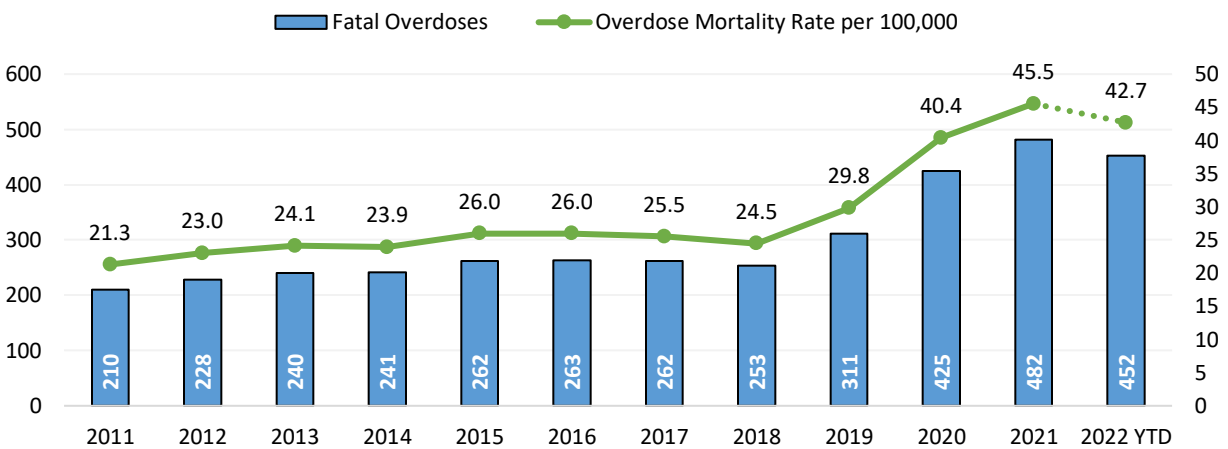
In December 2022, 62% of overdose fatalities involved fentanyl, either by itself or in addition to another substance. This proportion is similar to the average for the year, but in December, 31% of all fentanyl-involved overdoses were determined to be caused by fentanyl only. In previous months (September to November), this ranged between 5-13%. The other 69% of overdoses for this month involved fentanyl and at least one other drug, which was most commonly methamphetamine (39%).

Figure 2. Fentanyl-Involved Fatal Overdoses



While overdoses in December 2022 exceeded the alert level, **it is expected that the total number of fatal unintentional overdoses decreased in 2022.** Numbers provided in *Figure 3* are preliminary and subject to change as more deaths are certified. This decrease reflects the collective work being done in Pima County to reduce and prevent overdose deaths.

Figure 3. Number and Rate of Drug Overdose Deaths by Year





Provider Recommendations

- Alert and educate patients on the extreme risk of overdose and death associated with the use of fentanyl. Contact us for free posters for your clinics and/or other locations.
- Promote harm reduction messaging (e.g. never use alone, carry naloxone, tell a supportive person prior to using, never use multiple drugs simultaneously, use fentanyl testing supplies, use small incremental amounts, never assume remaining contents will produce same effect).
- Distribute naloxone and fentanyl testing supplies as frequently as possible for patients and families.
- Conduct clinical screenings for fentanyl using urine drug screens to provide early intervention and modify treatment plans, as needed. Encourage proper disposal of prescription medications. For more information, please visit [Dispose-A-Med](#).
- On December 29, 2022, [Congress eliminated the “DATA-Waiver Program,”](#) also known as the “X-Waiver” or “Buprenorphine waiver.” We encourage agencies and providers to expand or start the use of buprenorphine to treat OUD, when clinically indicated.

Overdose Risk Factors

- Using drugs alone or in secret if others are present.
- Individuals who have experienced an overdose in the past are at heightened risk of another overdose in the future.
- Returning to drug use following a period of abstinence, particularly after release from a hospital, jail, or other facility.
- Consuming multiple sedatives at the same time (e.g., opioids with alcohol, benzodiazepines, or hypnotics).
- Consuming sedatives with psychostimulants (e.g., opioids with cocaine or amphetamines).
- People who are experimenting with drugs with little tolerance or poor understanding of risk.

Our Commitment

- The Health Department will continue to conduct surveillance, closely monitor these trends, and share all findings and recommendations as they materialize.
- We offer no-cost presentations and trainings on the following topics; Narcan administration, overdose prevention, and the dangers of fentanyl. For a list of all trainings available, please visit [CMHA Presentations](#).
- We also offer free nasal naloxone kits that can be obtained directly [through the health department and throughout the community](#).
- Free fentanyl testing supplies are also available through the Health Department.
- The Health Department maintains [PimaHelpline.org](#), a web-based resource designed to assist individuals in locating resources and treatment options in the community for substance use related needs.

We hope this information will support treatment strategies and informative health messaging for patient populations. For any other questions or to reach out for the services mentioned, please contact us at CMHA@Pima.Gov or call (520) 724-7470.