



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Overdose deaths decrease slightly in 2018, the first decline in six years

LANSING, Mich. – After several years of increases in overdose deaths, in 2018 Michigan experienced a decrease overall, including a slight decline in opioid-related overdose deaths, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) announced today. In 2018, there were 2,599 overdose deaths, 2,036 of which were opioid-related.

Overall overdose deaths declined by 3.2 percent from 2017's 2,686 tally – with the deaths down for the first time in six years. Opioid-related overdose deaths decreased by 0.8 percent from the 2017 total of 2,053. The age-adjusted opioid overdose death rate decreased from 21.4 deaths per 100,000 residents in 2017 to 21.1 deaths per 100,000 residents.

“This is a step in the right direction, however, there is much work to be done, particularly when it comes to disparities and access to treatment,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health for MDHHS. “We have a plan in Michigan to cut opioid-related overdose deaths by half in five years and we will be using all available resources to make that goal a reality.”

The decline in opioid-related overdose deaths in 2018 was largely driven by decreases in the number of deaths due to poisoning by heroin and commonly prescribed natural and semisynthetic drugs such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, hydromorphone and oxymorphone. Drug poisoning deaths involving synthetic opioids such as fentanyl continue to climb.

“With the devastation that the opioid epidemic inflicts on families and communities, the Michigan State Police is committed to doing all that we can to help,” said Col. Joe Gasper, director of the Michigan State Police. “Whether it be from a prevention standpoint with our Angel Program that assists those struggling with opioid use to find treatment or our efforts to arrest drug traffickers and interdict shipments of fentanyl coming into our state, we’re committed to working with our state and federal partners to combat this deadly epidemic.”

Despite overall progress in decreasing overdose deaths, the data show troubling disparities across racial groups. MDHHS is firmly committed to ensuring equitable access to prevention, treatment, and harm reduction and taking targeted steps to address racial disparities.

- Overall overdose mortality rates among white residents decreased by 6.5 percent, while rates among black residents increased by 14.7 percent.
- Opioid overdose mortality rates among white residents decreased by 5.1 percent, while rates among black residents increased by 19.9 percent.

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- Michigan residents of other races experienced a 9.1 percent decrease in overall overdose mortality and an 8.7 percent decrease in opioid overdose mortality.

The state is using every available tool to combat the opioid epidemic. The collaborative efforts of state agencies are amplifying Michigan's efforts related to prevention and treatment of patients, education of health professionals and enforcement of over-prescribers.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, MDHHS and other members of the Michigan Opioids Task Force recently announced a slate of steps the state is taking to combat the opioid epidemic. The state's strategy addresses three key areas: preventing opioid misuse, ensuring individuals using opioids can access high-quality recovery treatment and reducing the harm caused by opioids to individuals and their communities.

Efforts include:

- Launching a \$1 million statewide anti-stigma campaign focused on changing the conversation about opioid use disorder treatment and encouraging Michiganders to seek treatment to help improve their lives and ultimately prevent overdoses.
- Releasing [a toolkit for medical providers](#) on safer opioid prescribing practices along with the University of Michigan Injury Prevention Center.
- Removing prior authorization requirements for specific medications used to treat these disorders, including buprenorphine, as of Monday, Dec. 2.
- Beginning Medication-Assisted Treatment programs in three state prisons with a goal of expanding treatment to all facilities by 2023.
- Expanding [syringe service programs](#) across the state to help reduce the amount of harm caused by opioid use disorder to individuals and their communities from 13 to 25 agencies.

In addition, the Michigan Opioids Task Force, created by Whitmer in August, held its first meeting last month to map out an action plan across state departments to meet this goal. The Task Force will announce additional actions in the coming months and conduct a series of regional townhall meetings to hear directly from individuals across the state about how the epidemic has affected their communities.

For more information about opioids and the additional steps residents can take to protect themselves and loved ones, visit Michigan.gov/Opioids.

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