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GROWTH OF OPIOID OVERDOSE DEATHS IN TAMPA BAY OUTPACING FLORIDA Overdose deaths among Black residents increasing at fastest rate

TAMPA, Fla. – Aug. 31, 2021 – A new report by [Project Opioid Tampa Bay](#) reveals that the growth of opioid overdose deaths in Tampa Bay is outpacing that of the state as a whole, particularly among Black residents. The research, released today on International Overdose Awareness Day, examines opioid overdoses in Tampa Bay by county and key demographic groups.

After three years of relative stability in opioid-related deaths across the region, recent data shows a significant increase in fatal opioid overdoses. The Tampa Bay Region lost 30 residents each week to an opioid fatality in the first six months of 2020, representing a 61.62% increase over the first six months of 2019. By comparison, opioid fatalities during the same period increased by 51.3% statewide.

Among Black, Non-Hispanic residents of Tampa Bay, opioid deaths are increasing at a more aggressive rate than all other demographic groups. The opioid fatality death rate for Black, Non-Hispanic residents grew by 129% in 2019 (the most recent year for which data is available), surpassing the relatively stable growth rates for White, Non-Hispanic (15%) and Hispanic (20%) populations in the region.

“What we’ve seen is the rise of an epidemic within the pandemic,” said Jennifer Webb, executive director of Project Opioid Tampa Bay. “Our findings show that opioid abuse surged in response to the mental and physical stress of COVID-19. Yet, even under largely the same conditions, overdose deaths in Tampa Bay, which are largely tied to fentanyl fatalities, appear to be growing much more rapidly than other communities in Florida. This is a concerning trend that impacts both the personal and economic health of our region.”

[VIEW THE FULL REPORT](#)

Other key findings include:

- Fentanyl, a synthetic street opioid, killed more people in Tampa Bay than all other substances combined during the first half of 2020. For the first time in seven years, alcohol was not the most prevalent drug reported in decedents across Florida. It’s now fentanyl.
- More newborns are born addicted to opioids in the Tampa Bay region than in the state and the nation. Tampa Bay’s rate of infants with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) is 58.9% higher than that of the state and 46.3% higher than that of the country.
- Opioid deaths cost the region an average of \$25.8 billion in economic output, and resulted in a total estimated fatality cost of \$14.2 billion to the Tampa Bay region. (This consists of \$6.7 million in health care costs, \$1.7 billion in lost productivity costs, and \$12.4 billion in costs associated with the statistical value of life lost.)

Opioid overdose is now the ninth leading cause of death in U.S. adults over 18 years old, exceeding deaths by traffic accidents, suicide, and the flu. According to initial estimates, more than 1,200 Tampa Bay residents died from opioid usage in 2020, exceeding the 1,024 deaths reported in 2019.

International Overdose Awareness Day, an event held on Aug. 31 each year, aims to raise awareness of overdose, reduce the stigma of a drug-related death, and acknowledge the grief felt by families and friends remembering those who have died or had a permanent injury because of drug overdose. Leaders are also stressing the increasing factor mental health is playing in this crisis adding even more pressure to those struggling with dangerous substances like opioids.

“This has become a perfect storm of mental health challenges, dangerous new drugs, and a pandemic that is putting pressure on all aspects of our society. The result is people dying of overdose in numbers never before seen,” said Andrae Bailey, founder and president of Project Opioid. “We have to find a way, in our family of communities, and even during our COVID-19 responses, to give people access to help if they are struggling with opioids. On August 31, we need to get the word out to those in need to not struggle and die alone in isolation.”

Project Opioid Tampa Bay is part of a coalition of Project Opioid initiatives throughout Florida, including Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Orlando and Jacksonville. The Tampa Bay Partnership launched this effort in April, in collaboration with the Florida Blue Foundation, to address the growing number of opioid overdose deaths in Tampa Bay.

Project Opioid Tampa Bay’s next phase of research will examine the state of intervention, prevention, and harm reduction initiatives throughout the region. That research, combined with its latest report, will provide business, faith, and philanthropic leaders in Tampa Bay with the data needed to develop regional strategies for combatting the opioid epidemic and saving lives.

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About the Tampa Bay Partnership

The Tampa Bay Partnership is a coalition of regional business leaders, joined by a shared commitment to improving the personal and economic well-being of Tampa Bay residents. Formally incorporated in 1994, and re-established in 2016 as a regional research and public policy organization, the Partnership works with Tampa Bay’s top employers, and a diverse group of government and nonprofit partners, to identify and address our region’s greatest challenges, and create new opportunities for the future.

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