



Opioids leading cause of drug overdose deaths in first half of 2019

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Sept. 3 (UPI) -- More than 80% of all drug overdose deaths reported across the country in the first half of 2019 involved opioids, according to figures released Thursday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

All of the 10 most common drugs or drug combinations found in overdose-related deaths during the first six months of last year included at least one opioid, the agency said.

Drugs used in these cases included illicitly manufactured fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and prescription opioid-based pain medications. Either alone or in combination, the five drugs were a factor in 77% of all drug overdose-related deaths.

"Three of four opioid overdose deaths involved illicitly manufactured fentanyl," the CDC researchers wrote. "[These drugs], heroin, cocaine or methamphetamine -- alone or in combination -- were involved in nearly 85% of overdose deaths."

Overdose death rates across the country in general dropped by 4.1 percent from 2017 to 2018, according to figures released by the CDC earlier this year.

Still, between 1999 and 2018, more than 750,000 Americans died following a drug overdose, the agency estimates.

The findings for the latest report are based on drug overdose death records in 24 states and Washington, D.C., for Jan. 1 to June 30 of last year.

In all regions, overdose deaths involving opioids without stimulants were most common, followed by deaths involving opioids and stimulants and deaths involving stimulants without opioids.

The pattern was most prominent in the Northeast and Midwest, where deaths involving opioids -- with or without stimulants -- accounted for 88% and 83% of all overdose deaths.

Among overdose deaths involving opioids, more than half of those who died were aged 25 to 44 years, and more than two-thirds of all overdose deaths involved men and three-quarters occurred in non-Hispanic White Americans.

"Evidence of injection drug use was more common among opioid-involved deaths than among deaths that did not involve opioids," the agency researchers wrote.

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