

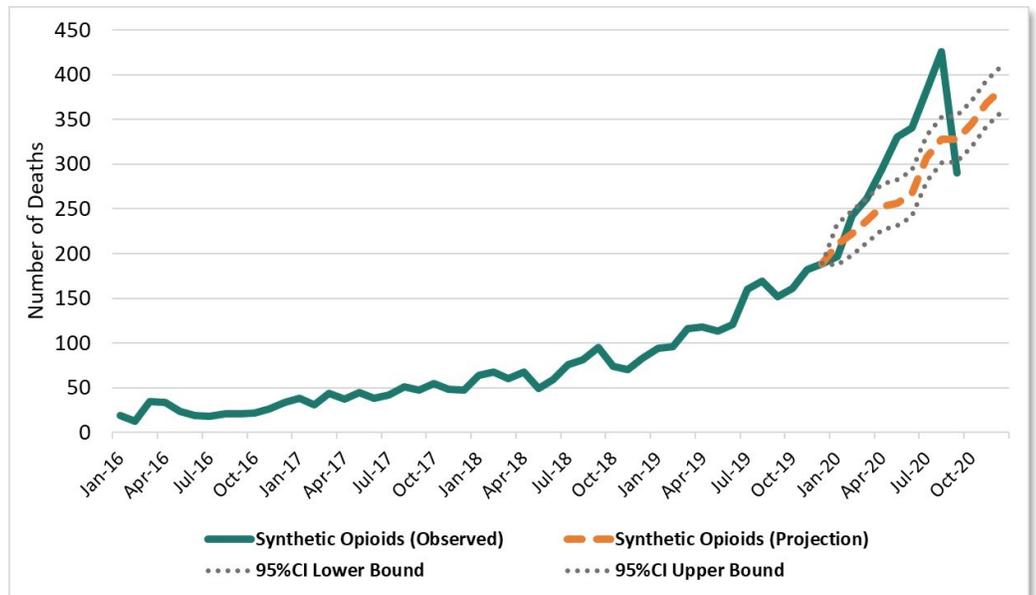
“ Synthetic Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths Increased at an Unpredictable Pace in 2020 ”

Key Points

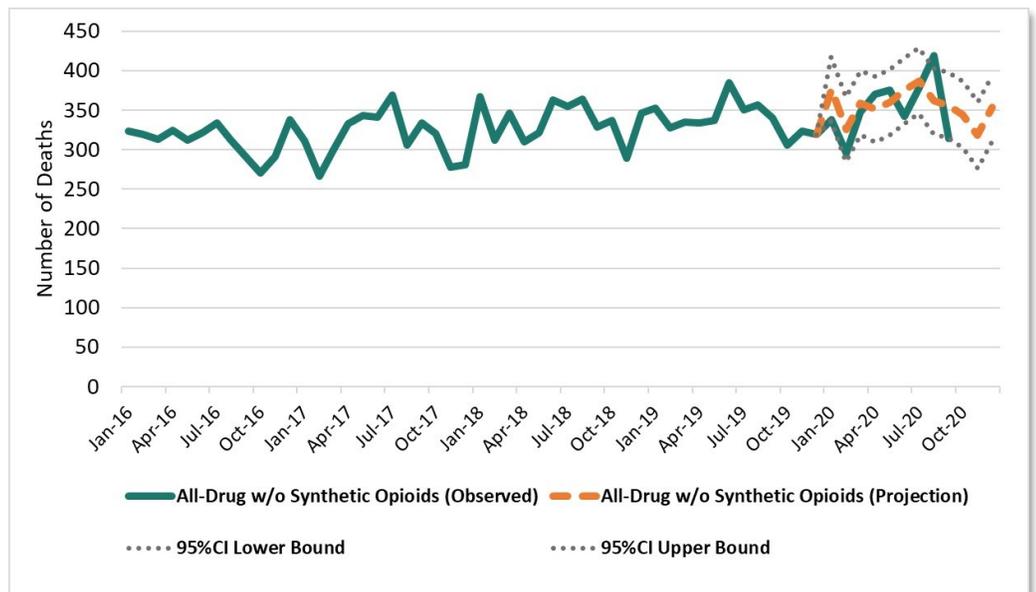
- Synthetic opioid-related overdose deaths are increasing.
- All-drug-related overdose deaths, excluding synthetic opioids, increased in 2020 at a predictable pace.
- Naloxone (Narcan), the antidote to opioid overdoses, is one of our best tools to prevent fentanyl deaths.
- Together, we can destigmatize substance use disorder by providing services in a culture of respect and safety.

Notes: CI = confidence interval; overdoses classified by the ICD-10 codes X40-X44; includes accidental deaths only; synthetic opioids excludes methadone and includes fentanyl and fentanyl analogs

Number of Preliminary Observed and Projected Synthetic Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths in California, 2016 – 2020



Number of Preliminary Observed and Projected All-Drug-Related Overdose Deaths, Excluding Synthetic Opioids, in California, 2016 – 2020



How to Help



Learn to Recognize an Overdose Event— Carry and Administer Naloxone

Naloxone, also known as Narcan, temporarily reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. Naloxone starts working almost immediately, it is not addictive, and has no effect if opioids are not in a person's system. Watch a [video](#) on how to recognize an overdose event and administer naloxone. *With a fentanyl overdose, two or more doses of naloxone may need to be administered.* **Call 911 after administering naloxone.**



Learn About California's Good Samaritan Law

In California, the [Good Samaritan Law](#) falls under California Health and Safety Code Section 1799.102. This law states that a person rendering emergency care is not liable for any civil damages resulting from their acts or omissions. **Get trained to save a life during an overdose event.**



Destigmatize Substance Use Disorder by Meeting People “Where They Are”

Harm reduction services focus on reducing the negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm reduction services promote respect, dignity, and the well-being of people who use drugs. Find [syringe access and harm reduction](#) services near you and learn how to [engage people who use drugs](#).



Promote Resources to Help Those with Substance Use Disorder

[Choose Change California](#) is a California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) website that provides an easy pathway to get help for people affected by substance use disorder.

[Non-Emergency Treatment Referral Line \(1-800-879-2772\)](#) is a California DHCS referral line that connects people to local resources and services from their County Alcohol and Other Drugs Program Office.

[Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) is a national treatment facility locator from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

About the Data

Background

The opioid epidemic in the United States has been described as a “triple wave epidemic” of overdose deaths¹:

- The first wave of overdose deaths, beginning in the 1990s, was due to prescription opioids.
- The second wave of overdose deaths, starting in 2010, was due to heroin.
- The third wave of overdose deaths, beginning slowly in 2013 then increasing dramatically as years passed, has been due to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

In California, since 2012, remarkable public health progress has been made to reduce the number of overdose deaths due to prescription opioids.

Unfortunately, the unpredictability of the illicit synthetic opioid market² shadows our effort to slow this crisis. In California, all-drug-related overdose deaths have been increasing for the past decade mainly due to the increase in synthetic opioid-related deaths (primarily fentanyl) ([California Opioid Overdose Surveillance Dashboard](#)).

Methods and Data Sources

The two figures compare (preliminary) *observed* number of accidental overdose deaths to *projected* number of overdose deaths by month for deaths occurring within California. Projected numbers were calculated using an Autoregressive Integrated Moving

Average (ARIMA) model; data source was California Comprehensive Master Death Files, 2016 - 2019. 2020 observed deaths are preliminary and may not be complete; data source is California Comprehensive Death File (Dynamic), extracted on 2/13/2021. Any projected values are considered estimates with a degree of uncertainty.

Summary of Results

- The number of observed deaths (solid green line) for synthetic opioids, excluding methadone, is higher than projected (dashed orange line) in 2020 based on past mortality trends.
- Based on the most recent available 2020 observed data (preliminary, January to September), the average number of observed monthly synthetic-opioid-related overdose deaths is 5% more than the projected number of overdose deaths.
- The number of observed deaths (solid green line) for all-drug-related overdoses, excluding synthetic opioids, is not higher than projected (dashed orange line) in 2020 based on past mortality trends.

Conclusion

The opioid epidemic remains a serious public health issue in California. Since 2015, the opioid epidemic has shifted to include more potent synthetic opioids of illicit supply, including fentanyl², which is one reason for the dramatic increase of drug-related overdose deaths.

Prepared by Substance and Addiction Prevention Branch, California Department of Public Health.

References:

1. Ciccarone, D. (2017). Fentanyl in the US heroin supply: A rapidly changing risk environment. *The International journal on drug policy*, 46, 107-111.
2. Gladden, RM, Martinez, P, Seth, P. (2016). Fentanyl Law Enforcement Submissions and Increases in Synthetic Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths — 27 States, 2013–2014. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*; 65:837–843.