

February 26, 2024

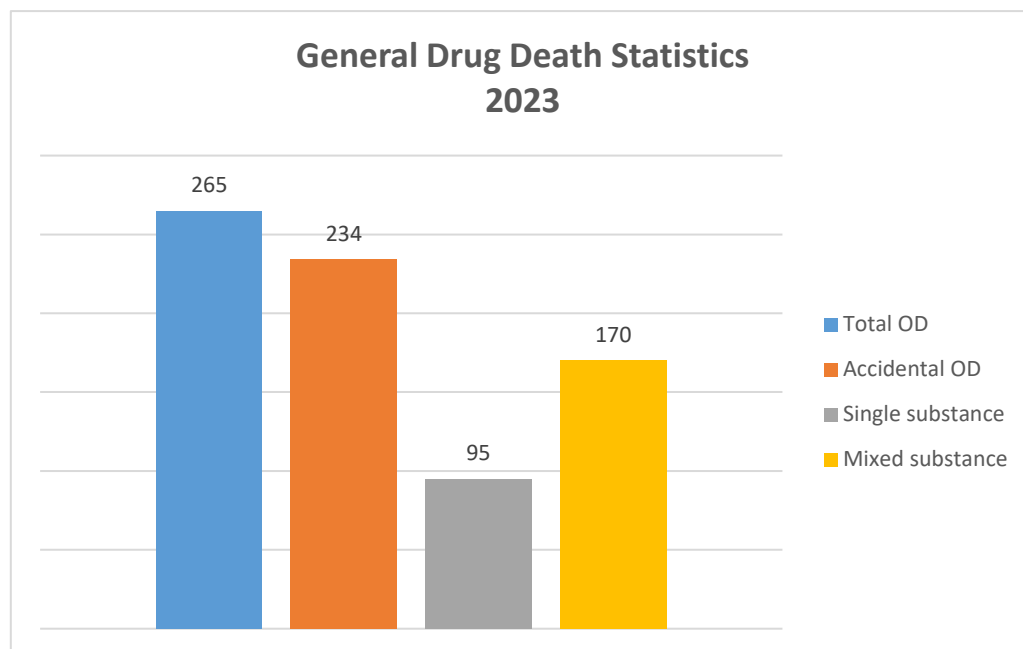
Special Report: 2023 Fatal Overdoses

2,035 deaths were reported to the Ventura County Medical Examiner's Office during the 2023 calendar year. Jurisdiction was accepted for 1012 of these deaths, requiring further investigation and certification. Postmortem examinations were performed on 785 cases. Of the cases investigated, 265 deaths were due to overdose with medications, alcohol and or illicit drugs.

Of the 265 overdose deaths, 234 were accidents, 22 were suicides, eight deaths were of undetermined manner and one was a homicide. Of these overdose deaths, men accounted for 201 deaths (76%) and women accounted for 64 deaths (24%).

Noteworthy trends:

- 1) The total number of overdoses in 2023 represent a 5% decrease since 2022 and a 8% decrease since 2021.
- 2) The number of fentanyl related overdoses decreased by 2% compared to the previous year.
- 3) Methamphetamine related overdoses decreased by 25% compared to the previous year.
- 4) The highest number of overdose deaths in 2023 were between ages 31 to 40 years (67 deaths). The highest number of fentanyl overdose deaths were between ages 31 and 40 (58 deaths).
- 5) The tranquilizer xylazine contributed to one death in 2023 which also involved fentanyl.
- 6) The designer drug and illicit benzodiazepine known as bromazolam contributed to seven deaths. All seven deaths also involved fentanyl.





COUNTY of VENTURA

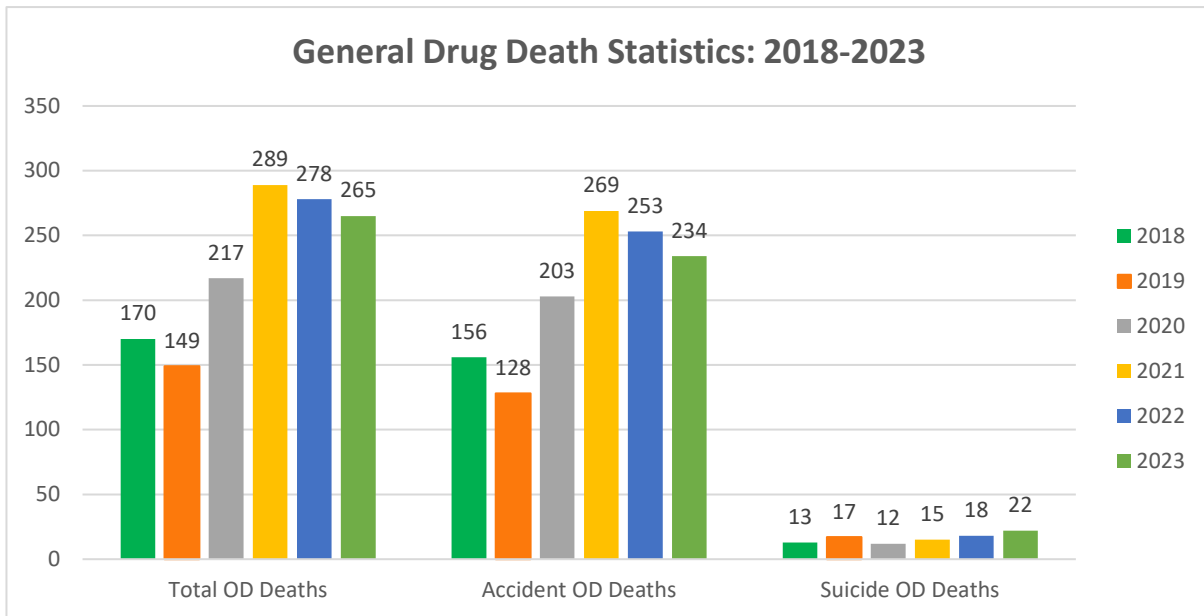
Medical Examiner's Office

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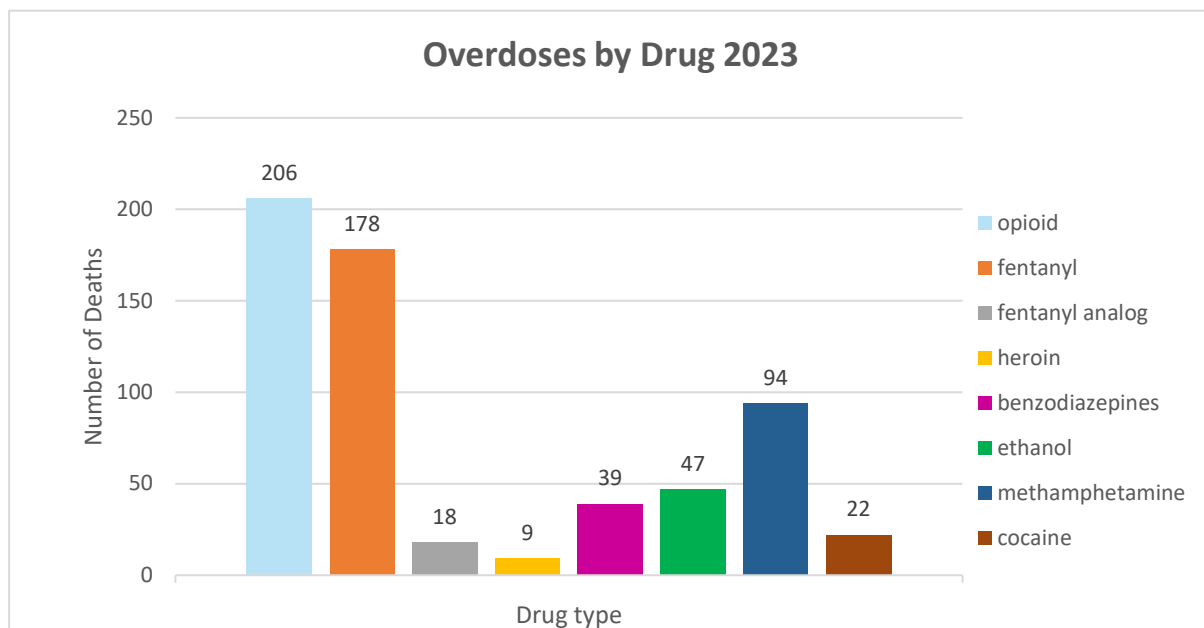
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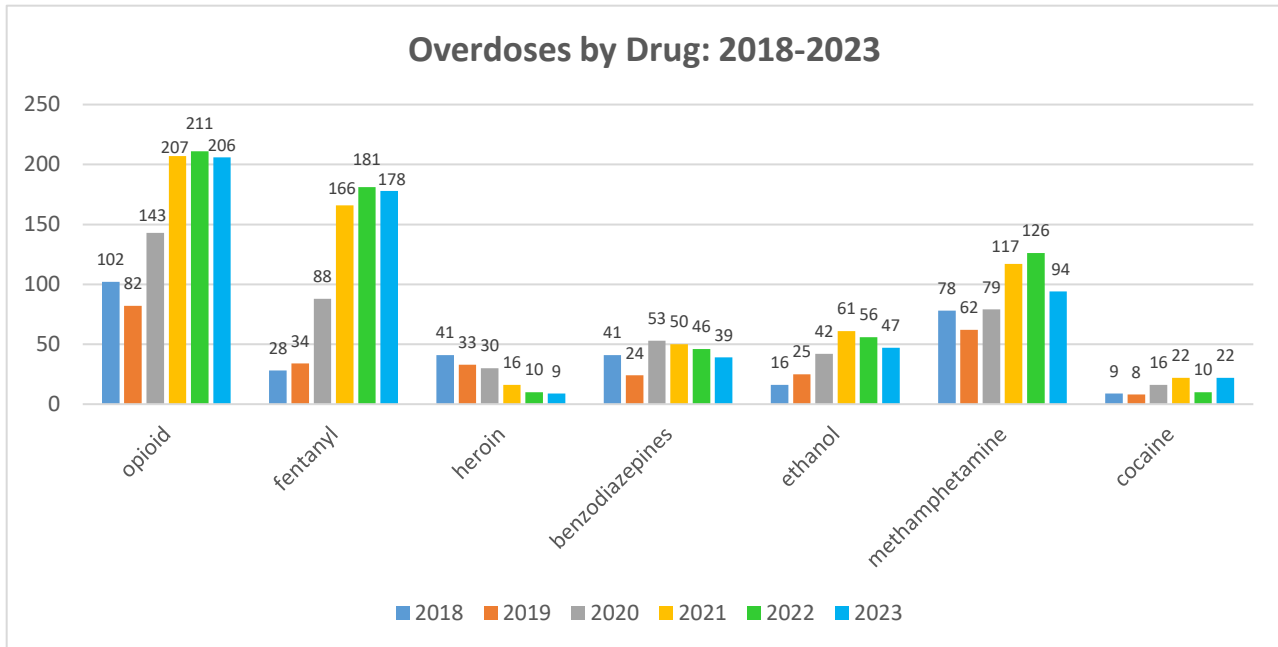
In 2023, the manner of death for eight overdose deaths was undetermined and one was homicide



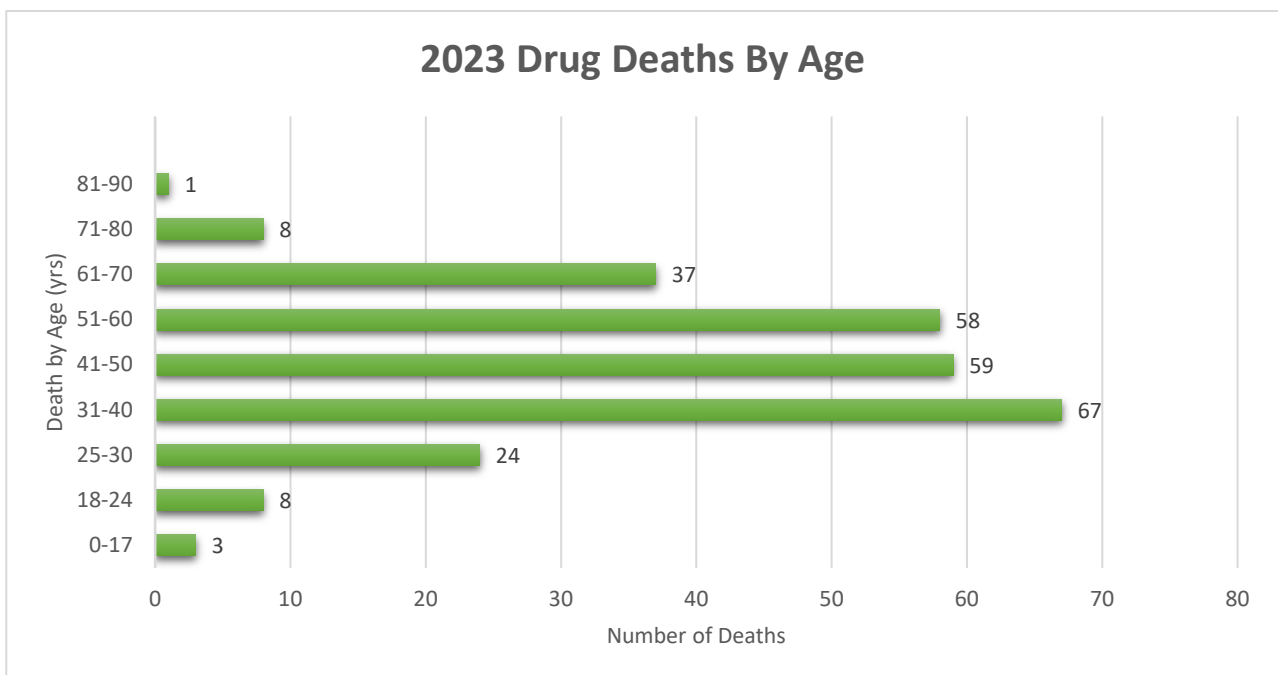
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Fentanyl is an opioid drug. A death resulting from fentanyl will be included in the totals for both opioid and fentanyl overdoses.





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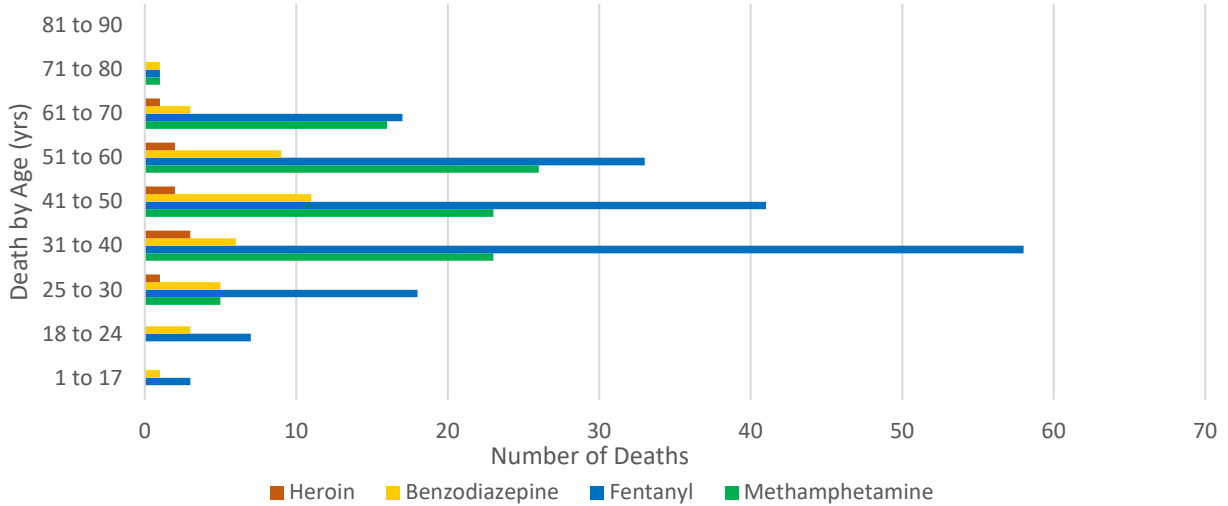
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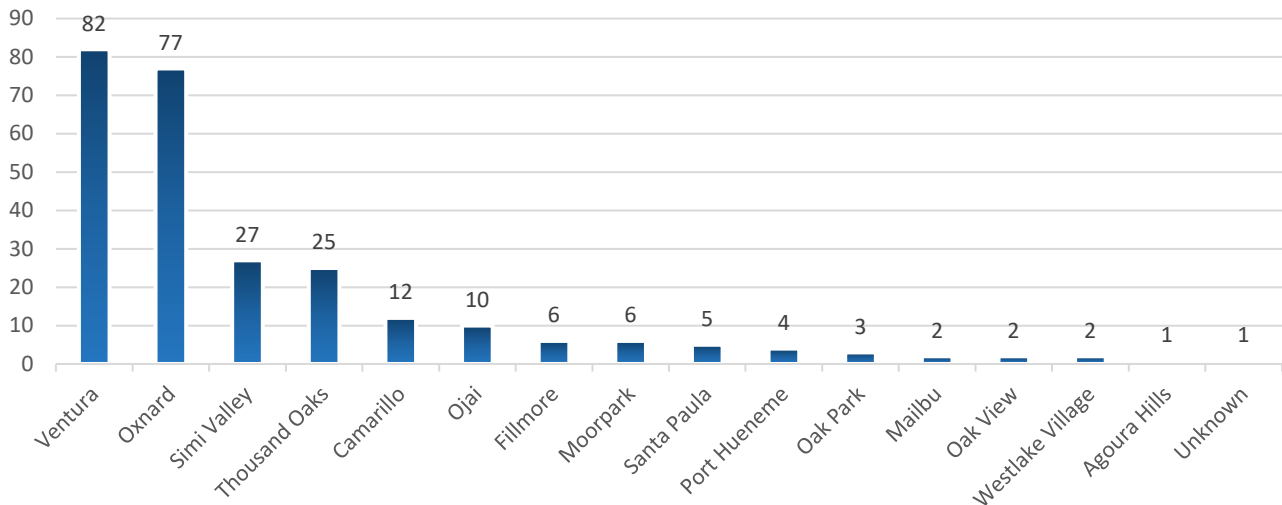
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2023 Deaths By Age: Heroin, Benzodiazepine, Fentanyl, and Methamphetamine



2023 Fatal Overdoses By Location of Injury





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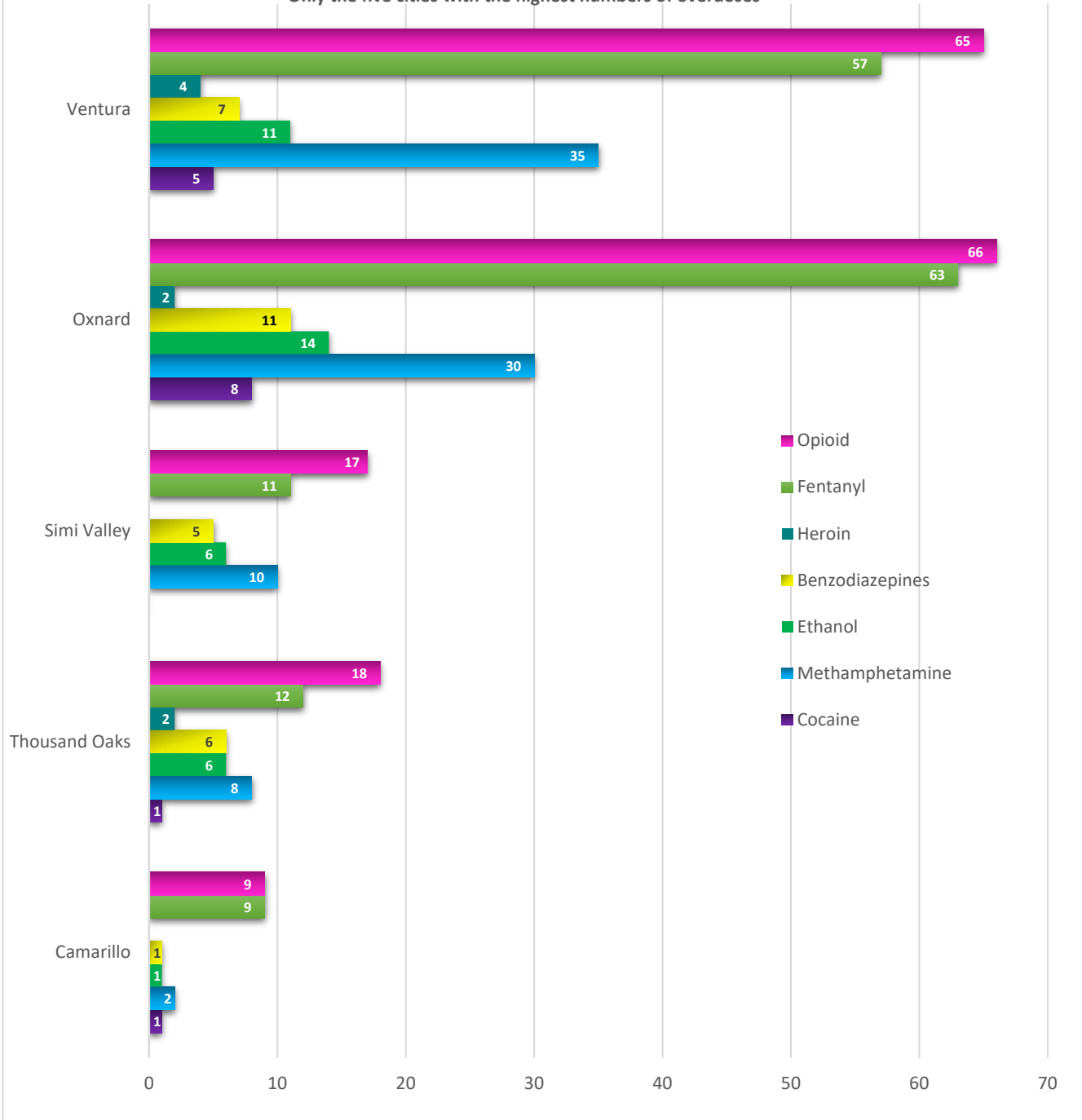
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2023 Fatal Overdoses by City of Injury and Drug

* Only the five cities with the highest numbers of overdoses





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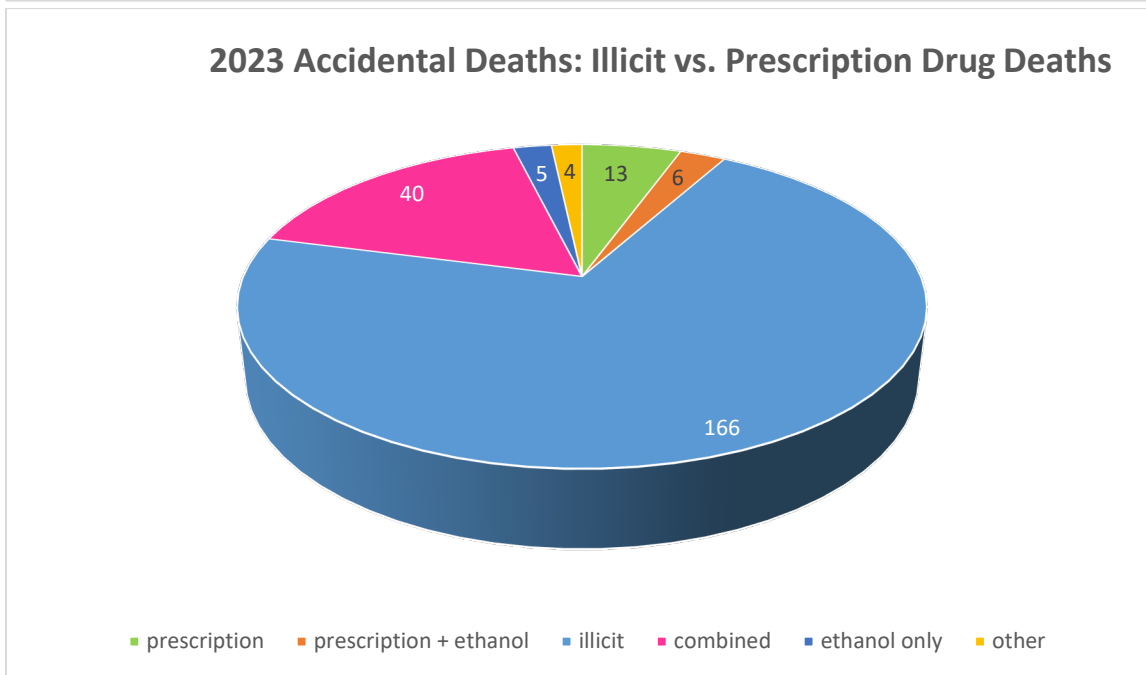
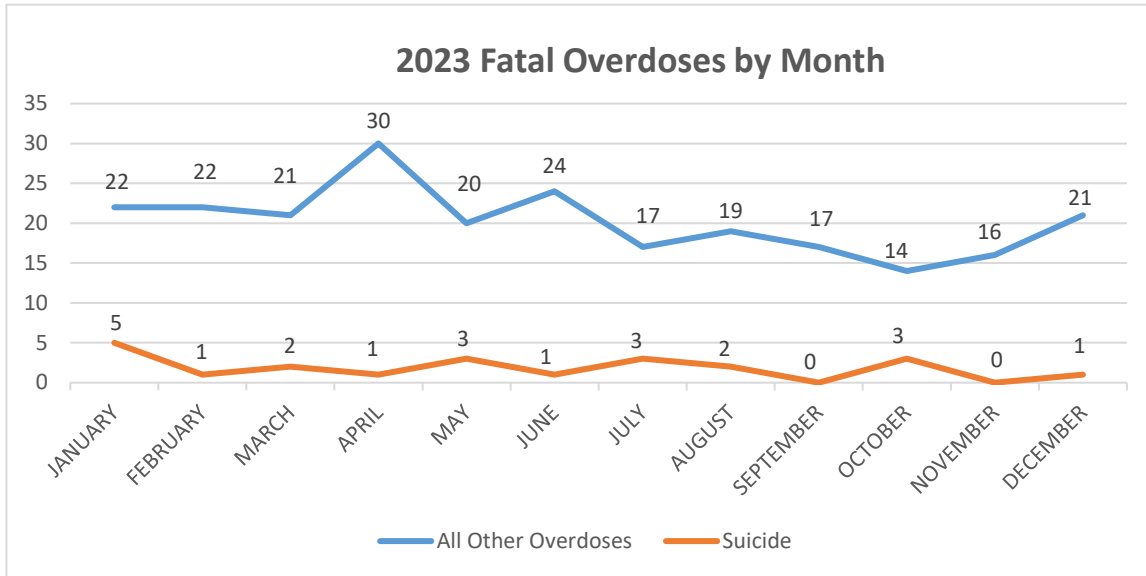
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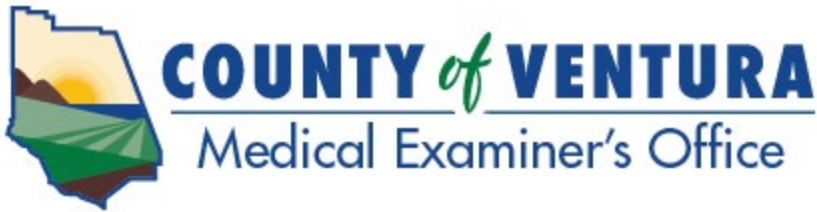
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Prescription drugs refers to medications commonly obtained through prescription; however, in some deaths, the prescription drugs may have been illicitly obtained.



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Data Explanation/Overview:

Multiple drugs or medications may be involved in one case; therefore, one should not add the numbers of individual substances. **The same case may be represented multiple times with different drugs or drug categories. For example, a death due to fentanyl is included in both the fentanyl and opioid totals.** Overdose by city reflects the location of injury (overdose). In some cases, the location of death is different than the location of injury because of transport to a medical facility prior to death.

APPENDIX:

Benzodiazepines: Sometimes called “benzos,” these are sedatives (central nervous system depressants) often used to treat anxiety, insomnia, and other conditions. Combining benzodiazepines with other central nervous system depressants like opioids or alcohol increases a person’s risk of overdose and death.

Bromazolam: Bromazolam is a novel benzodiazepine which is not approved for medical use in the United States. Bromazolam has been reported in the illicit drug supply in combination with other drugs like fentanyl.

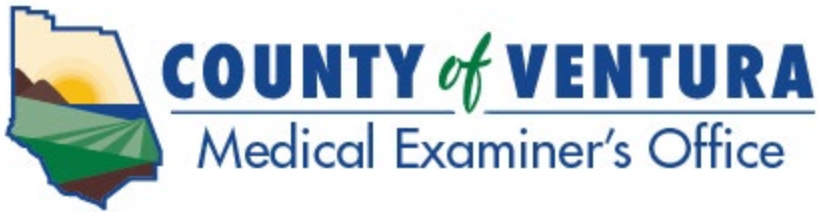
Cocaine: Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug obtained from leaves of the coca shrub that stimulates the central nervous system. Cocaine has high potential for abuse but can be administered by a doctor for legitimate medical uses, such as local anesthesia for some eye, ear, and throat surgeries.

Ethanol: In this report, ethanol refers to ethyl alcohol (drinking alcohol). Ethanol is a central nervous system depressant and can be especially dangerous when combined with other central nervous system depressants like benzodiazepines or opioids.

Fentanyl: Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, approved for treating severe pain, typically advanced cancer pain. Since the 1990s, the drug has been available in a patch or lozenge for easy and effective delivery of time-released medicine. It is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. Illicitly produced fentanyl is sold through illicit drug markets for its heroin-like effect, and it is often mixed with other drugs, such as methamphetamine, or pressed in to counterfeit prescription pills.

Fentanyl Analogs: Fentanyl analogs are illicit and often deadly alterations of the medically prescribed drug fentanyl. The analogs have a similar chemical structure to fentanyl, and they have similar pharmacological effects as the original drug.

Heroin: An illegal, highly addictive opiate drug processed from morphine and extracted from certain poppy plants.



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Methamphetamine: A highly addictive central nervous system stimulant drug that is also categorized as a psychostimulant. Methamphetamine use has been linked to mental disorders, problems with physical health, violent behavior, and overdose deaths.

Opiates: Opiates are chemical compounds that are extracted or refined from natural plant matter (poppy sap and fibers). Examples of opiates include opium, morphine, codeine, and heroin.

Synthetic Opioid Drugs: Synthetic opioids refer to drugs that bind to opiate receptors which are produced in a lab and not derived from plant matter. The pharmaceutical industry has created more than 500 different opioid molecules. Some are widely used medically, some are not. Examples of well-known opioids used medically in the U.S include hydrocodone, oxycodone, oxymorphone, methadone, fentanyl and loperamide.

Opioid drugs: "Opioid drugs" is a broad term which includes both natural, plant derived opiates and synthetic opioid drugs. Opioids work in the brain to produce a variety of effects, including pain relief. As a class of substances, they act on opioid receptors to produce morphine-like effects. Opioid drugs include both illicit and prescribed substances including fentanyl (prescribed or illicit), oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, heroin, methadone etc.

Xylazine: Xylazine is a tranquilizer which is not approved for human medical use in the United States. This drug is a central nervous system depressant which is increasingly being found in the illegal drug supply in the US. Like other central nervous system depressants, this drug can be especially life-threatening when combined with opioids like fentanyl.

**Erratum: An error was identified in the Overdose Report for 2022. Data included for calendar year 2022 in graphs labeled "Accidental Overdoses by Drug" were not limited to accidental overdoses and included the 18 suicides and seven deaths of undetermined manner. Despite this oversight, the overall trend for fentanyl overdose deaths was not significantly affected. For example, during calendar year 2022 there were 179 accidental fentanyl overdoses and 181 total fentanyl overdose deaths.*

***The aforementioned error brings to light a recent trend in overdose deaths in Ventura County. In past years, intentional overdoses rarely involved illicit drugs of abuse but more commonly involved prescription drugs or prescription drugs and alcohol. In recent years, more and more non-accidental deaths are being identified that involve drugs of abuse like fentanyl and methamphetamine. As the opioid epidemic and fentanyl crisis play out in Ventura County, deaths from illicit substances are clearly not limited to accidental deaths. In an effort to better represent the opioid and illicit substance deaths occurring in the county, the graphs comparing drug trends from past years now include data from all overdose deaths.*