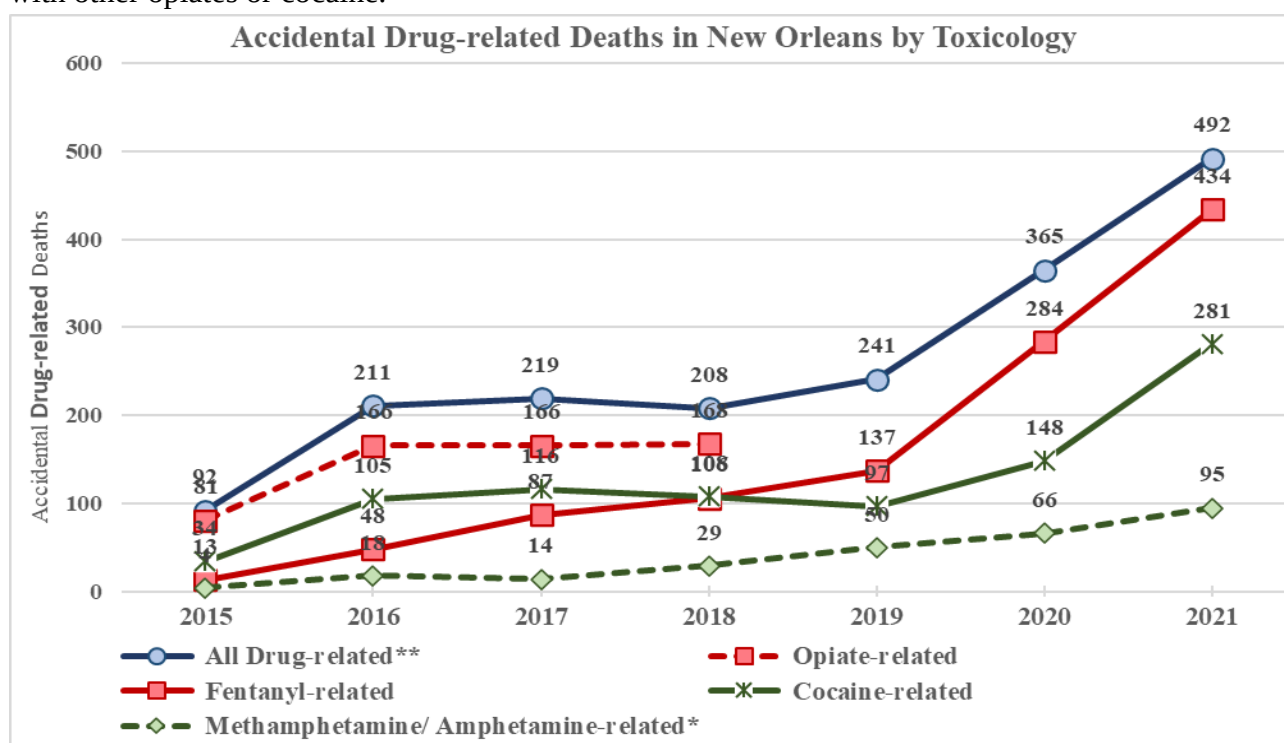


Accidental Drug-related Death Trends¹ in New Orleans, 2016-2021, based on New Orleans Coroner's Reports

Coroners are required to determine the cause for deaths occurring within their jurisdiction for those deaths specified in Louisiana Law (RS 13:5713) and to report those deaths to the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH). In addition, investigations are required in cases that may be homicide, suicide, deaths that are the result of an accident, sudden or unexplained deaths.² (This includes accidental drug-related deaths.) Investigations of certain cases may take a month or longer to complete and require updating of preliminary data reported to LDH.

“All Drug-related” means the presence of any psychoactive drug that contributed to the death of the individual. Multiple drugs are often found to contribute to an individual’s death. Therefore, counts for specific drugs are not mutually exclusive. For instance, fentanyl is often found mixed with other opiates or cocaine.



* Reported as "Amphetamine" in 2019-2020 but as "Methamphetamine/ Amphetamine" previously.

** For 2021, "All Drug-related" includes 30 cases in which the specific drug(s) involved were unknown because the case report is based only on review of medical records that did not include toxicology results.

- From 2016 through 2018 the total annual number of drug-related accidental deaths in Orleans Parish remained relatively constant, between 208 and 219. Beginning in 2019 total accidental drug-related deaths increased in Orleans Parish, to 241 from 208 in the previous year (a 16% increase). Then **from 2019 to 2021 annual drug-related accidental deaths more than doubled (104%), from 241 to 492.**

¹ Analysis and presentation of this data is supported in part by a Drug Free Communities grant to the Greater New Orleans Drug Demand Reduction Coalition. Questions regarding the analysis or presentation of this data may be directed to Robert J Gallati (rjgallati@yahoo.com).

² <http://neworleanscoroner.com/death-investigation/>.

- Between 2016 and 2019 annual fentanyl-related accidental deaths rose rapidly from 48 to 137. Then, even more dramatically, **fentanyl-related accidental deaths more than tripled from 137 in 2019 to 434 in 2021 (217%)**.
- For 2019 fentanyl was found in 57% of all drug-related accidental deaths while **in 2021 fentanyl was found in 9-in-10 of drug-related accidental deaths (88%)**.³
- While the number of fentanyl-related accidental deaths increased by 297 cases between 2019 and 2021, the total drug-related accidental deaths increased by only 251. Thus, **the increase in total drug-related accidental deaths is principally attributable to an increase in fentanyl-related deaths**.
- For the period 2016 through 2019, the number of accidental cocaine-related deaths remained relatively constant, between 97 and 116, but from 2019 to 2021 accidental cocaine-related deaths increased from 97 to 281. **In 2021, cocaine was found in 57% of drug-related accidental deaths**.⁴
- Amphetamine-related accidental deaths increased from 18 in 2016 to 95 in 2021. **In 2021, amphetamine-rated substances were found in 19% of drug-related accidental deaths**.⁵

**New Orleans Coroner's Reports:
Accidental Drug-related Deaths in New Orleans,
2016—2020**

Toxicology	Parish	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
All Drug-related	Orleans	211	219	208	241	365	492
Opiate-related	Orleans	166	166	168			
Fentanyl-related	Orleans	48	87	106	137	284	434
Cocaine-related	Orleans	105	116	108	97	148	281
Methamphetamine/ Amphetamine*	Orleans*	18	14	29	50	66	95
Medical Record Review Only**							30

* Reported as "Amphetamine" in 2019-2020 but as "Methamphetamine/ Amphetamine" previously.

** Coroner's case report is based only on review of medical records in which toxicology results were not available to indicate the specific substance(s) involved.

³ The denominator of the percentage includes 30 cases for which the specific drug(s) involved is unknown because, for these cases, the coroner was only able to review medical records that did not include toxicology results.

⁴ The denominator of the percentage includes 30 cases for which the specific drug(s) involved is unknown because, for these cases, the coroner was only able to review medical records that did not include toxicology results.

⁵ The denominator of the percentage includes 30 cases for which the specific drug(s) involved is unknown because, for these cases, the coroner was only able to review medical records that did not include toxicology results.

Data Sources

The New Orleans Coroner's Office publishes a brief annual report on accidental drug-related deaths as a press release. (See below.) This data is released 2 to 3 months after the close of the calendar year.

- New Orleans Coroner Press Release, March 20, 2022, <http://neworleanscoroner.com/press-releases/>
- New Orleans Coroner Press Release, March 2, 2021, <http://neworleanscoroner.com/press-releases/>
- New Orleans Coroner Press Release, April 28, 2019, <http://neworleanscoroner.com/press-releases/>

2021 Coroner's Report on Accidental Drug-Related Deaths in New Orleans New Orleans Coroner Press Release, March 20, 2022

- In 2021, there were (492) accidental drug deaths in New Orleans, a 35% increase compared to (365) in 2020.
- In 2021, 77% were male, and 33% were female, similar to previous years.
- In 2021, (304) 62% were black, (164) 33% were white, (13) 3% were hispanic, (6) 1% were asian, and (5) 1% were other/unknown. In 2020, (204) were Black, (151) were White, (6) were Hispanic, and (4) were other/unknown.
- As in previous years, toxicological analysis in most drug-related deaths revealed the presence of multiple drugs. Because we are missing toxicology results for 30 cases due to these cases being medical record reviews (MRRs)—for which we do not have access to toxicology results—the following numbers/percentage may differ slightly from what they would be, if we had all results.
- In 2021, (434) overdose cases tested positive for fentanyl, a synthetic opioid. Of the 462 overdose cases for which we have toxicology results (out of 492 total cases), 94% tested positive for fentanyl in 2021. In 2020, (284) 78%, tested positive for fentanyl.
- In 2021, (281) tested positive for cocaine. Of the 462 overdose cases for which we have toxicology results (out of 492 total cases), 60% tested positive for cocaine in 2021. In 2020, (148) 40% tested positive for cocaine.
- In 2021, (95) tested positive for amphetamines. Of the 462 overdose cases for which we have toxicology results (out of 492 total cases), 20% tested positive for amphetamines in 2021. In 2020, (66) 18% tested positive for amphetamines.

According to New Orleans Coroner, Dr. Dwight McKenna, “The fact that 94% of overdose cases are linked to fentanyl shows our community faces a crisis that grows more severe each year. We are seeing similar high numbers across the country, and it proves just how deadly fentanyl is. This year's report serves as a warning to make all citizens aware that (highly lethal) fentanyl is regularly being cut into cocaine and street pills. Because of fentanyl, using street drugs in this day and age is like playing Russian roulette with your life.”

2019/2020 Coroner's Report on Accidental Drug-Related Deaths in New Orleans New Orleans Coroner Press Release, March 2, 2021

- The number of accidental drug-related deaths in Orleans Parish increased by 51% in 2020 compared to 2019. In 2020, there were (365) accidental drug deaths. In 2019, there were (241).
- In 2020, (204) were Black, (151) were White, (6) were Hispanic, and (4) were other/unknown. In 2019, (115) were Black, (113) were White, (4) were Hispanic, (3) were Asian, and (6) were other/unknown.
- As in previous years, toxicological analysis in most drug-related deaths revealed the presence of multiple drugs.
- In 2020, (284 or 78%) tested positive for fentanyl (a synthetic opioid), a 107% increase compared to 2019, when (137) tested positive for fentanyl.
- In 2020, (148 or 40%) tested positive for cocaine, a 52% increase compared to 2019, when (97) tested positive for cocaine.

- In 2020, (66 or 18%) tested positive for amphetamines, a 32% increase compared to 2019, when (50) tested positive for amphetamines.

New Orleans Coroner, Dr. Dwight McKenna, says, “The opioid epidemic in Orleans Parish is being fueled by a highly lethal, synthetic opiate known as fentanyl. As a result, street drugs in New Orleans are more deadly than they have ever been. In 2020, the number of overdose deaths in New Orleans was almost double the number of homicides.”

2018 Coroner’s Report on Accidental Drug-Related Deaths in New Orleans
New Orleans Coroner Press Release, April 28, 2019

- There were (208) accidental drug-related deaths in Orleans Parish in 2018, as compared to (219) in 2017, (211) in 2016, and (92) in 2015:
 - 80% (166) of accidental drug-related deaths in 2018 were male, and 20% (43) were female. No significant change was seen in gender distribution during the last several years.
 - 50% (105) were White, 48% (100) were African-American, and 2% (3) were Hispanic in 2018. African-Americans represented 52% in 2017, 45% in 2016, and 28% in 2015.
 - As in previous years, toxicological analysis in most drug-related deaths revealed the presence of multiple drugs.
- 81% (168) tested positive for opiates in 2018, as compared to (166) in 2017 and 2016, and (81) in 2015:
 - Of those (168) who tested positive for opiates in 2018, (106) tested positive for fentanyl (a synthetic opioid), as compared to (87) in 2017, (48) in 2016, and (13) in 2015.
- 52% (108) tested positive for cocaine in 2018, as compared to (116) in 2017, (105) in 2016, and (34) in 2015.
- 14% (29) tested positive for methamphetamines/amphetamines in 2018, as compared to (14) in 2017, (18) in 2016, and (4) in 2015.

New Orleans Coroner, Dr. Dwight McKenna, says, “The opioid epidemic continues to claim lives in New Orleans. The opiate market keeps rising towards highly lethal, less expensive, synthetic opiates such as fentanyl. The number of drug overdose deaths continues to surpass the number of homicides in the city. It is our mission and charge to continue to stay unified with the city in the fight against the drug overdose crisis.”