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Contact: Clinton Bennett, DHSS: (907) 269-4996, clinton.bennett@alaska.gov

State report compiles Alaska's drug overdose data from 2013-2017

ANCHORAGE – The Division of Public Health Section of **Health Analytics & Vital Records** and the **Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention** within the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services released the [2017 Drug Overdose Mortality Update](#) today, examining all drug overdose deaths using Alaska mortality data through 2017.

DHSS had earlier released a brief preliminary [report](#) for opioid overdose mortalities through June of 2018, showing a decline in opioid overdose deaths during the first half of this year. The new report provides updated data for all drug overdose mortalities, not just opioid overdoses, based on data from 2013 through the end of 2017.

Mirroring national trends, the new report shows an overall increase in overdose deaths between 2013 and 2017. In 2017, Alaska's age adjusted overdose death rate reached the highest level for Alaska in 10 years, at 19.3 deaths per 100,000 people. Between 2013 and 2016 (the most recent year for which national data are available), overdose deaths increased by 43.5 percent nationwide; during that same period, rates increased by 21.1 percent in Alaska.

The data show trends in overdose mortality for various classes of drugs. Use of methamphetamine (classified as a psychostimulant) and fentanyl (a very potent opioid analgesic/pain reliever) were on the rise in Alaska during the period, with overdose deaths related to these two drugs more than doubling since 2013.

Overdose deaths increasingly involve more than one substance. Of the 620 drug overdose deaths that occurred in Alaska over the last five years, a quarter involved alcohol, approximately 17 percent involved a combination of opioid analgesic/pain relievers and sedatives like benzodiazepines, while 11 percent involved a combination of opioid analgesic/pain relievers and psychostimulants like methamphetamines.

“These data show how the opioid epidemic has evolved, with an increasing number of deaths involving other substances, including stimulants and alcohol,” said DHSS Commissioner and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Jay Butler. “All of this highlights the need to not just focus on opioids, but to address the broader issues of substance misuse and addiction, including binge drinking and alcoholism, and how misuse of these substances affects public health, public safety, and the criminal justice system.”

Recent progress to reduce drug overdoses in Alaska includes the widespread distribution of the opioid overdose reversal drug naloxone, new training for health care providers and prescribers and the designation of Alaska as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, which brings \$5 million in annual federal funding to support collaborative drug enforcement.

Here are some key findings from the report specific to drug overdose in Alaska:

- From 2013-2017, there were 620 deaths due to drug overdose.
- Between 2016 and 2017, drug overdose deaths increased for each drug category except for heroin and other narcotics.
- More males than females died of drug overdoses in 2017, but from 2013 to 2017, overdose rates for females are increasing at higher rates than for males.
- Five of the top ten drug combinations involved in drug overdoses from 2013-2017 include opioid analgesics/pain relievers. The highest ranking combination includes opioid analgesics/pain relievers and sedatives, accounting for one out of six overdose deaths.

[Read the full report here.](#)

For more information:

[DHSS Health Analytics and Vital Records Data and Statistics](#)

[DHSS Office of Substance Misuse and Addiction Prevention](#)

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