

Substance Use in Pueblo County

Overdose deaths

Overdose death rates in Pueblo County have steadily climbed since 2000 with the largest jump occurring in 2011. Many factors contributed to this including increased access to opioid prescriptions and heroin, fentanyl in the drug supply, a breakdown in social connectedness and community involvement, a history of trauma, and financial stressors.^{1,2} The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these factors by causing further social isolation and reducing access to substance use treatment and therapy.³ From 2019 to 2020, Pueblo County saw an increase in overdose deaths (32.7 per 100,000 to 38.7 per 100,000). The overdose death rate in 2021 increased further to 46.1 per 100,000 and was also higher than the overall rate for Colorado.

Someone died in Pueblo County of a drug overdose every week in 2021. These deaths are preventable.

Key findings

- Most overdose deaths occur among individuals aged 30-39 (Graph A). In 2021, 31% of overdose deaths occurred among individuals in this age group
- Males make up a higher percentage of fatal overdose deaths (Graph A). In 2020 and 2021 males made up 71% of overdose deaths.
- Almost half of all fatal drug overdoses involve more than one substance (polydrug use). In 2020, 38% of overdose deaths involved more than one substance. In 2021, 56% of overdose deaths involved more than one substance (Graph B).
- Fentanyl's presence in the drug supply continues to increase. In 2020, 9% of drug overdoses involved fentanyl. By 2021, fentanyl increased to 19%.

Definitions

Social connectedness:

The experience of belonging to a specific group or feeling close and connected to others.⁴

Polydrug use:

The use of more than one drug or type of drug at the same time or one after another.⁵

History of trauma:

Intergenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural group that has a history of being oppressed.⁶

Social isolation:

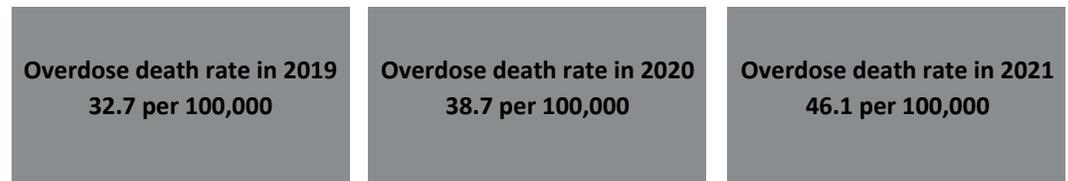
A lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with on a regular basis.⁷

Overdose death rate:

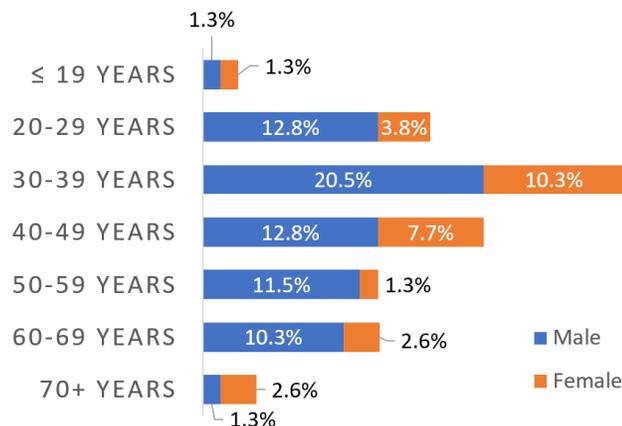
The number of overdose deaths occurring among the population during a given year per 100,000.

Overdose Deaths in Pueblo County

This data shows all fatal incidents as crude rates per 100,000 as determined by the Pueblo County Coroner's office. Many deaths are associated with multiple drugs (polydrug). Presence of a drug does not necessarily indicate direct cause of death.



A. Overdose Deaths By Age and Gender



Data Source: Pueblo County Coroner

Timeframe: 2021

B. Number of Substances Present in Fatal Overdoses



Data Source: Pueblo County Coroner
Timeframe: 2021

Narcan/Naloxone Use

Since 2019, harm reduction agencies reported an increase in self-reported Naloxone/Narcan use. Potential reasons behind this trend may be due to increased access to Naloxone/Narcan and knowledge of the life-saving potential of these resources. Naloxone/Narcan administered by emergency transport has seen similar patterns of increased use from 2020 to 2021. Of importance, carrying Naloxone/Narcan can help save a life. From May 2020 to 2021, 701 lives were saved in Pueblo County with the use of Naloxone/Narcan.

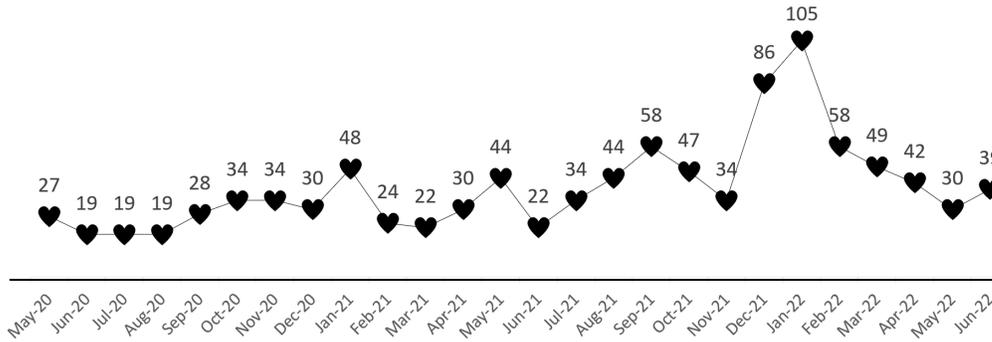
Key Findings

- Self-reported Naloxone/Narcan use increased 86% from 2020 to 2021 as reported by harm reduction agencies.
- Naloxone administration by emergency transport reported approximately 230 events in 2021 or an average of 19 events each month.
- In 2021, Naloxone distribution has remained steady with an average of 694 kits delivered to harm reduction clients each month.
- In 2021, an average of 41 lives were saved each month.

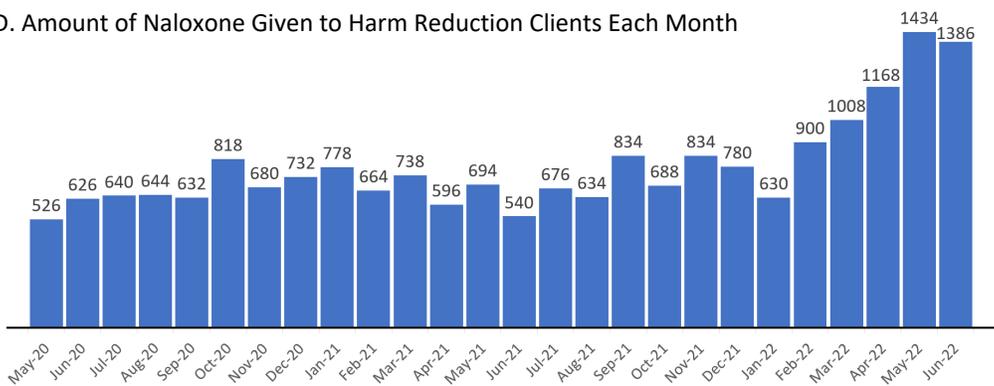
Naloxone/Narcan® Administration

These graphs indicate the number of instances individuals who are not first responders reported using Naloxone/Narcan to reverse opioid overdoses. Naloxone/Narcan is provided to individuals by several harm reduction agencies in Pueblo County and is a cornerstone of harm reduction practices intended to minimize the harm to people using drugs.

C. Number of Lives Saved Each Month With Naloxone



D. Amount of Naloxone Given to Harm Reduction Clients Each Month



Graph C and D Data Source: Pueblo Harm Reduction Agencies

Timeframe: May 2020 - June 2022

Definitions

Naloxone:

Medication that treats opioid overdoses rapidly in an emergency situation. When naloxone was first approved to reverse opioid overdoses, its brand name was Narcan®. There are now many other formulations and brand names for naloxone, but many people continue to call all of these products “Narcan.”⁸

Naloxone Kits:

Take-home Naloxone kits contain everything needed to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Each kit contains naloxone, alcohol swabs, latex gloves, a rescue breathing mask, and steps to respond to an overdose event.⁸

Harm Reduction:

Refers to a range of public health policies designed to lessen the negative social and/or physical consequences associated with various human behaviors, both legal and illegal. Harm reduction agencies work to increase access to evidence-based harm reduction strategies such as overdose prevention, syringe access, and fentanyl strip testing.⁹

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- 8)NIDA. <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/naloxone>
- 9)National Harm Reduction Coalition. <https://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/>

For more information or additional questions, email data@pueblocounty.us