



# OVERDOSE RESPONSE STRATEGY

PUBLIC HEALTH | PUBLIC SAFETY | PARTNERSHIP



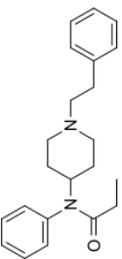
Hawai'i ORS Team - Richard Witt & Aashish Hemrajani

## Fentanyl Fact Sheet

Hawai'i, and the United States as a whole, is in the midst of an unprecedented drug overdose epidemic. **Since 1999**, there have been **over 1 million lives lost** to overdose. **2021 saw the highest number of overdose deaths recorded at 107,622, two-thirds of which involved fentanyl.**<sup>1</sup> With the use of naloxone, an opioid overdose reversal agent, and a number of other public health interventions, the fact is that many of these deaths can be prevented.

### WHAT IS FENTANYL?

Fentanyl is a Schedule II synthetic opioid that is 100x more potent than morphine.<sup>2,3</sup> Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed for severe pain, especially after surgery or in advanced-stage cancer. Overdose deaths are being driven by Illicitly Manufactured Fentanyl (IMF) that is smuggled into the country and introduced into the drug supply through counterfeit pills and powder that is laced into drugs like heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine.<sup>4</sup>



### Hawai'i has seen a significant increase in fentanyl-related deaths since 2018.<sup>5</sup>

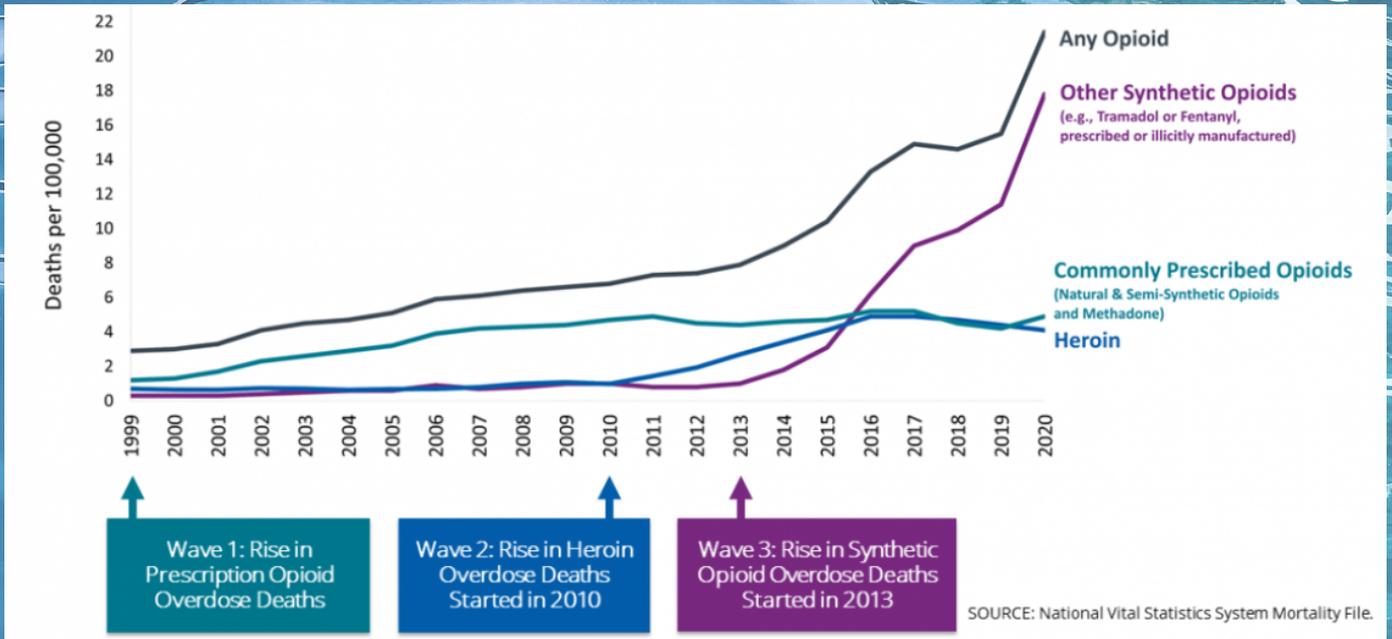
Fentanyl deaths more than doubled between 2018 - 2019, and have continued increasing every year since. Fentanyl continues to make up a larger proportion of overall drug deaths in our state, and is now involved in the majority of all opioid related deaths.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Percent increase of fentanyl deaths year over year		111%	47%	71%	65%
Percent of opioid-related deaths involving fentanyl	13%	26%	37%	45%	61%

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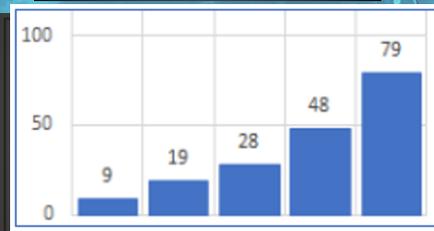
CDC has identified three waves of the opioid overdose crisis. The first wave began with the increased use of prescription opioids since at least 1999. Following reforms in prescribing practices, a second wave began in 2010 with increases in deaths from heroin. Since 2013, we have seen a third wave of deaths driven by synthetic opioids, particularly IMF.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>



Isn't that a mainland problem?

Fentanyl is being laced into non-opioid drugs like methamphetamine & cocaine, creating overdose risk for opiate naive users who aren't expecting it and do not have a tolerance. This is especially important to consider when addressing overdose in Hawai'i, where the most prevalent illicit drugs are stimulants like meth.

FENTANYL DEATHS 2018-2022



How do we reduce the risk?

Opioids like fentanyl cause overdose deaths by depressing the respiratory drive.

Drug checking technologies reduce the risk of accidental overdose. Fentanyl test strips are an inexpensive way to inform users of the presence of fentanyl and encourage risk mitigation, but you should be aware that any street drug may be laced with fentanyl.

Naloxone reverses opioid overdoses and allows normal breathing. It binds to the brain's opioid receptors, blocking the effect of opioids for 90-120 minutes. It was FDA approved in 1971 and has been distributed to people at high risk in Hawai'i since 2016.

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