



## Commonwealth of Kentucky Justice & Public Safety Cabinet

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### 2015 Report Released on Overdose Deaths

*Numbers indicate that heroin addicts are consuming fentanyl, and many may not be aware*

**FRANKFORT, Ky.** (June 14, 2016) – A report today from the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy underscores the dangers of fentanyl, an extremely potent opioid that is leading to more overdose deaths, often because dealers mix it with heroin and sell the lethal blend to unwitting addicts.

“As I read the latest report on overdose deaths in Kentucky, I am heartbroken for the Commonwealth,” said Gov. Matt Bevin. “More than three families a day are shattered by this epidemic of untimely death. This is unacceptable and will be vigorously addressed with every resource at our disposal.”

Fentanyl-related deaths have been on the rise across the country over the past year, and experts say many addicts are not aware they are consuming the drug. It is 30 to 50 times more potent than heroin and can prove deadly at very low levels, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

In Kentucky, fentanyl was a factor in 420 fatal overdoses in 2015, up from 121 in the previous year. The drug contributed to 34 percent of all overdose deaths in the state, frequently in combination with heroin or other drugs.

Overall, fatal overdoses totaled 1,248 last year, compared to 1,071 in 2014. Heroin was detected in 28 percent of cases, consistent with the previous year. However, as a total, heroin-related deaths increased in 2015, largely because the drug is being laced with fentanyl.

“The introduction of illicit fentanyl into the heroin trade is producing devastating results,” said Van Ingram, director of the Office of Drug Control Policy. “Whether it’s manufactured to resemble heroin or a prescription pill, the cartels have made an already dangerous situation worse.”

The numbers are part of the 2015 Overdose Fatality Report, which the Office of Drug Control Policy released today. The report was compiled with data from the Kentucky Medical Examiner’s Office, the Kentucky Injury Prevention & Research Center and the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics.

According to the DEA, international drug cartels are producing fentanyl in illicit labs or smuggling it over the southern U.S. border. Traffickers use it to spike heroin or mix it with other binding agents before selling it on the street. The drug’s high potency allows them to reap more profit.

Even in prescription form, fentanyl is classified as a Schedule II narcotic, and only prescribed for severe pain, often near the end of a patient's life.

"All stakeholders working to reduce these senseless, preventable deaths must use every opportunity to educate those suffering from an opioid use disorder about the increased danger from these illicit drugs," Ingram said.

Along with efforts to combat heroin, the Kentucky General Assembly and the Office of Drug Control Policy have been collaborating on efforts to fight fentanyl abuse in recent years.

The legislature passed a bill in 2015 to improve treatment and increase penalties for traffickers. The measure – Senate Bill 192 – also included a number of harm reduction efforts, such as improved access to naloxone, a life-saving drug that can reverse opioid overdoses.

Under the new law, trafficking in two or more grams of heroin – or fentanyl – is now considered a Class C felony for the first offense and a Class B felony for subsequent offenses. The legislation also classified synthetic fentanyl as a Schedule I narcotic.

In addition, Gov. Bevin and the General Assembly increased funding for anti-drug efforts in the upcoming state budget. The plan allocates \$15.7 million in fiscal year 2017 and \$16.3 million in fiscal year 2018. That's compared to the \$10 million in the current fiscal year.

"We all know someone who has suffered under this scourge, and today's report is another troubling reminder that the complex problem of drug abuse demands a multi-faceted approach," said Kentucky Justice Secretary John Tilley. "We must remain focused and proactive and continue to build on these efforts."

Among other significant findings in the report:

- Jefferson County had the most overdose deaths of any county, with 268.
- Jefferson County also had the largest increase, up from 204 deaths in 2014. Kenton County increased from 71 deaths in 2014 to 112 last year. Fayette County went from 112 in 2014 to 141 in 2015.
- The largest decrease occurred in Knox County, which had 12 fewer fatalities in 2015 compared with the previous year. Other counties with significant declines in 2015 include Bullitt County, which declined by 11; McCracken County, which declined by 10; and Perry County, which declined by 9.
- Overdose deaths in some Kentucky counties, when compared on a per-capita basis, showed high rates. The eight counties with the most overdose deaths per 100,000 people for the period between 2012 and 2015 are:

1. Leslie County	68.6 per 100,000
2. Bell County	61.2 per 100,000
3. Gallatin County	52.6 per 100,000
4. Knott County	48.7 per 100,000
5. Wolfe County	48.3 per 100,000
6. Floyd County	47.6 per 100,000
7. Campbell County	47.2 per 100,000
8. Kenton County	46.3 per 100,000

- The top five counties for heroin-related overdose deaths, using data from the Kentucky Medical Examiner and coroner reports, were:

1. Jefferson County	131
2. Kenton County	51
3. Fayette County	34
4. Campbell County	20
5. Boone County	19

- The top five counties with the most fentanyl-related overdose deaths were:

1. Kenton County	53
2. Fayette County	51
3. Jefferson County	39
4. Boone County	29
5. Campbell County	20

- The top five counties with the most heroin/fentanyl combination overdose deaths were:

1. Kenton County	21
2. Fayette County	19
3. Jefferson County	17
4. Boone County	13
5. Campbell County	12

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