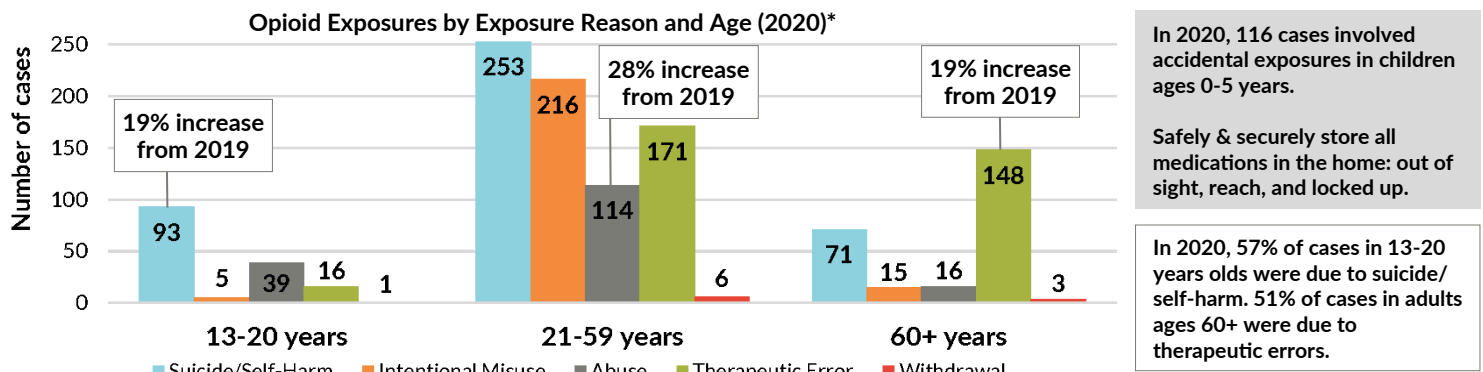


Exposure Trends During the COVID-19 Pandemic Special Focus: Opioids & Opiates

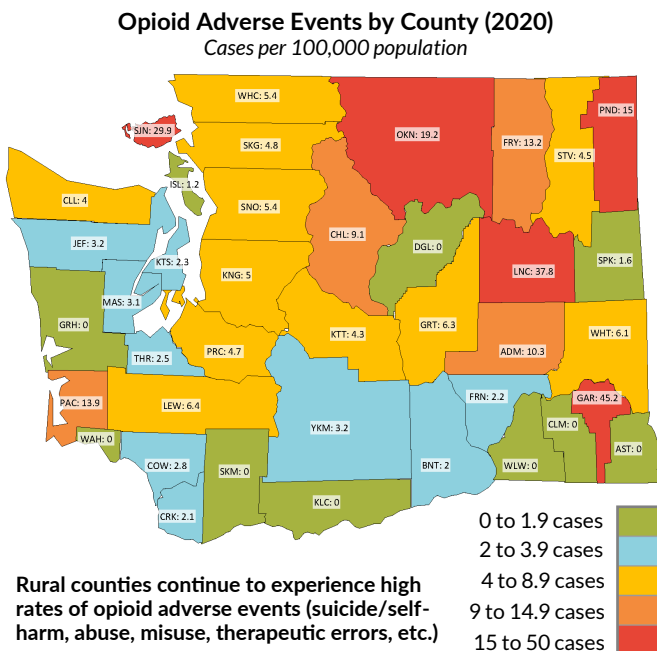
Issued March 19, 2021 | Contact mryuk@wapc.org with questions

Increases in substance use, overdose (fatal and nonfatal), and worsened mental health continue to be reported across Washington state—signs of the COVID-19 pandemic’s toll, as well as repercussions from the ongoing opioid epidemic and mental health crises facing communities. Cases managed by the Washington Poison Center (WAPC) involving opioids and opiates increased 3.6% overall (1,464 cases to 1,516 cases) from 2019 to 2020, with greater increases among specific age groups, substances, and exposure reasons. These data generate many questions as the pandemic continues, including how factors like access barriers to healthcare providers, changes in support systems, and self-treatment or coping are affecting both illicit and legal substance use, as well as call volume at the WAPC.

The following data compares exposures involving [opioids and opiates](#) reported to the WAPC during 2020 (January 1-December 31) to those reported in 2019. Some cases may involve more than one opioid or opiate. See [glossary](#) for data term definitions.



The most common clinical effects reported were cardiovascular, neurological, gastrointestinal, and respiratory.

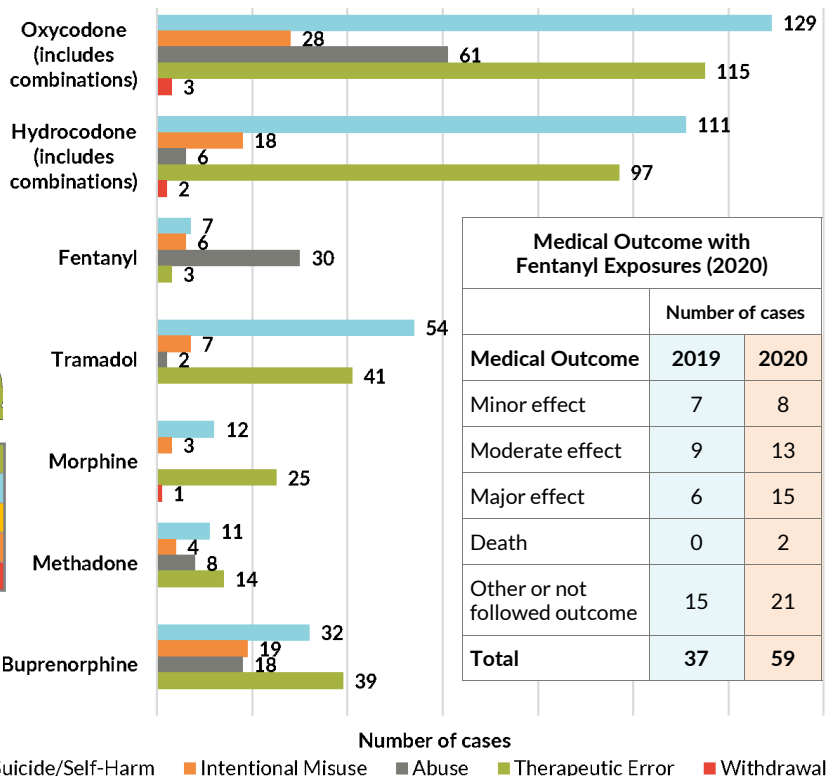


Rural counties continue to experience high rates of opioid adverse events (suicide/self-harm, abuse, misuse, therapeutic errors, etc.)

When the poison center was called **first**, 86% of patients in 2020 with non-self harm-related opioid exposures were managed at home by WAPC specialists. Keeping these patients out of the emergency department saved approximately \$447,135 patient dollars.

Selected Opioid Substances by Exposure Reason (2020)*‡

The WAPC continues to see high rates of suicide/self-harm & therapeutic errors



Medical Outcome with Fentanyl Exposures (2020)

Medical Outcome	Number of cases	
	2019	2020
Minor effect	7	8
Moderate effect	9	13
Major effect	6	15
Death	0	2
Other or not followed outcome	15	21
Total	37	59

*Not all exposure reasons are included; ‡Cases may involve more than one substance

Disclaimer: Reporting of exposures to the Washington Poison Center is voluntary and not mandated by law. As such, these data reflect only the exposures reported to the Washington Poison Center, and are most likely an underrepresentation of the true occurrence of any one substance.