

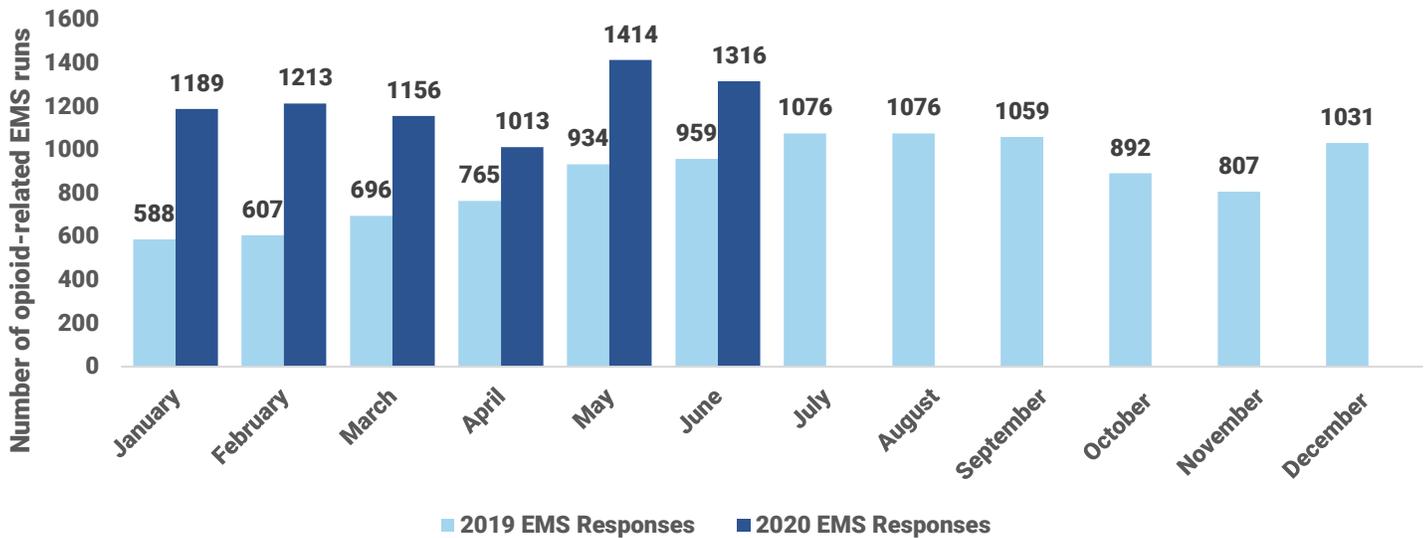


# CHICAGO OPIOID UPDATE: Mid Year

Opioid-related overdose deaths are provisional, and subject to change. For informational use.

There were **7,301** opioid-related EMS responses and **573** opioid-related deaths in Chicago in January-June 2020. This is a **60%** increase in opioid-related EMS responses and a **55%** increase in deaths compared to 2019.

Chicago opioid-related EMS responses by month, 2019 and 2020



Opioid-Related Overdose, Chicago		
	Counts	2019 to 2020 % Change
<b>January-June</b>		
EMS Runs <sup>1</sup>	7,301	60.5%
Naloxone doses administered <sup>2</sup>	8,878	57.5%
Opioid- Related Overdose Death <sup>3</sup>	573	54.9%

### Key Findings:

- 573 opioid-related overdose deaths occurred in Chicago from January-June 2020, over a 50% increase from the same time period in 2019.
- Over 80% of opioid-related overdose deaths involved-fentanyl .
- In Chicago during the first half of 2020, opioid-related overdose deaths were the highest among men; Non-Latinx Blacks; and adults age 45-54.
- All age groups experienced an increase in opioid-related death rate from the first half of 2020 as compared to 2019. The greatest increases were among 15-25 and 65-74 year-olds.
- EMS has responded to opioid-related overdoses in 76 of 77 community areas

### Recent CDPH actions to combat the opioid epidemic:

- CDPH has expanded overdose prevention and harm reduction services in communities of highest need. These services include naloxone distribution, syringe services, and linkage to medication assisted treatment.
- CDPH has piloted a mobile treatment team that deflects persons arrested in possession of cocaine/heroin into treatment services. This pilot expands these deflection services across all Chicago police districts.
- CDPH has funded Illinois Public Health institute (IPHI) to convene a Learning Collaborative for hospital and community-based providers to expand evidence-based approaches to overdose prevention and treatment of opioid use disorder.
- CDPH funded a novel drug checking program that allows persons who use drugs to have their drugs checked prior to usage to reduce risk of overdose by identifying adulterants that increase overdose risk.
- With guidance from the West Side Heroin/Opioid Task Force, CDPH helped to facilitate the formation of the new South Side Opioid Task Force.
- For more information about opioids in Chicago visit:

<https://overcomeopioids.org/>

<sup>1</sup>Chicago Fire Department Emergency Medical Services. Data provided reflect all EMS responses where naloxone was administered and where there was indication of opioid involvement. These cases have not been confirmed by a clinician.

<sup>2</sup>This count only reflects naloxone administered by the Chicago Fire Department Emergency Medical Services.

<sup>3</sup>This count comes from the Cook County Medical Examiner's office as of 7/22/20. **Numbers are provisional and subject to change.**

## Opioid-related overdose death characteristics, Chicago January - June 2020

	January - June 2019			January - June 2020			2019-2020
	n	%	Rate <sup>ii</sup>	n	%	Rate <sup>ii</sup>	% Change in rate
<b>Chicago</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>53.7%</b>
<b>Drug Type<sup>i</sup></b>							
Heroin-involved	211	57.0%	7.8	264	46.1%	9.7	24.4%
Fentanyl-involved	297	80.3%	11.0	471	82.2%	17.2	56.4%
Fentanyl – only opioid involved	118	31.9%	4.3	213	37.2%	7.7	79.1%
Opioid pain reliever-involved <sup>iii</sup>	26	7.0%	0.9	36	6.3%	1.2	33.3%
Methadone-involved	25	6.8%	0.9	62	10.8%	2.3	155.6%
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	284	76.8%	21.7	438	76.4%	33.3	53.5%
Female	86	23.2%	6.2	135	23.6%	9.5	53.2%
<b>Race-Ethnicity<sup>iv</sup></b>							
Black, non-Latinx	204	55.1%	21.5	340	59.3%	35.6	65.6%
White, non-Latinx	114	30.8%	11.8	151	26.4%	15.8	33.9%
Latinx	50	13.5%	6.9	73	12.7%	10.6	5.0%
Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Latinx	1	0.3%	0.4	5	0.9%	2.9 <sup>^</sup>	625.0%
<b>Age (years)<sup>v</sup></b>							
0-14	0	0.0%	0	1	0.2%	0.1 <sup>^</sup>	-
15-24	5	1.4%	1.2	29	5.1%	7.1	491.7%
25-34	57	15.4%	11.1	86	15.0%	16.7	50.5%
35-44	68	18.4%	18	96	16.8%	25.4	41.1%
45-54	127	34.3%	37.5	157	27.4%	46.3	23.5%
55-64	91	24.6%	34.6	149	26.0%	56.7	63.9%
65-74	22	5.9%	14.6	50	8.7%	33.1	126.7%
75+	0	0.0%	0	3	0.5%	3.3	-

## Polysubstance use among opioid-related overdose deaths, Chicago January-June 2020

	January - June 2019			January - June 2020			2019-2020
	n	%	Rate <sup>ii</sup>	n	%	Rate <sup>ii</sup>	% Change in rate
<b>Chicago</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>53.7%</b>
<b>Drug Type<sup>i</sup></b>							
Opioid-only	208	56.2%	7.7	347	60.6%	12.8	66.2%
Cocaine-involved	127	34.3%	4.7	193	33.7%	6.9	46.8%
Methamphetamine-involved	10	11.6%	0.3	15	2.6%	0.6	100.0%
Benzodiazepine-involved	49	13.2%	1.7	32	5.6%	1.2	-29.4%

**Data Source:** Cook County Medical Examiner's office as of 6/7/20. **Numbers are provisional and subject to change** US Census Bureau. Note: NH = Non-Hispanic. Numbers include all opioid-related overdose deaths that occurred in Chicago, regardless of decedent's address of residence.

<sup>i</sup> Categories are not mutually exclusive as some deaths involved more than one type of opioid.

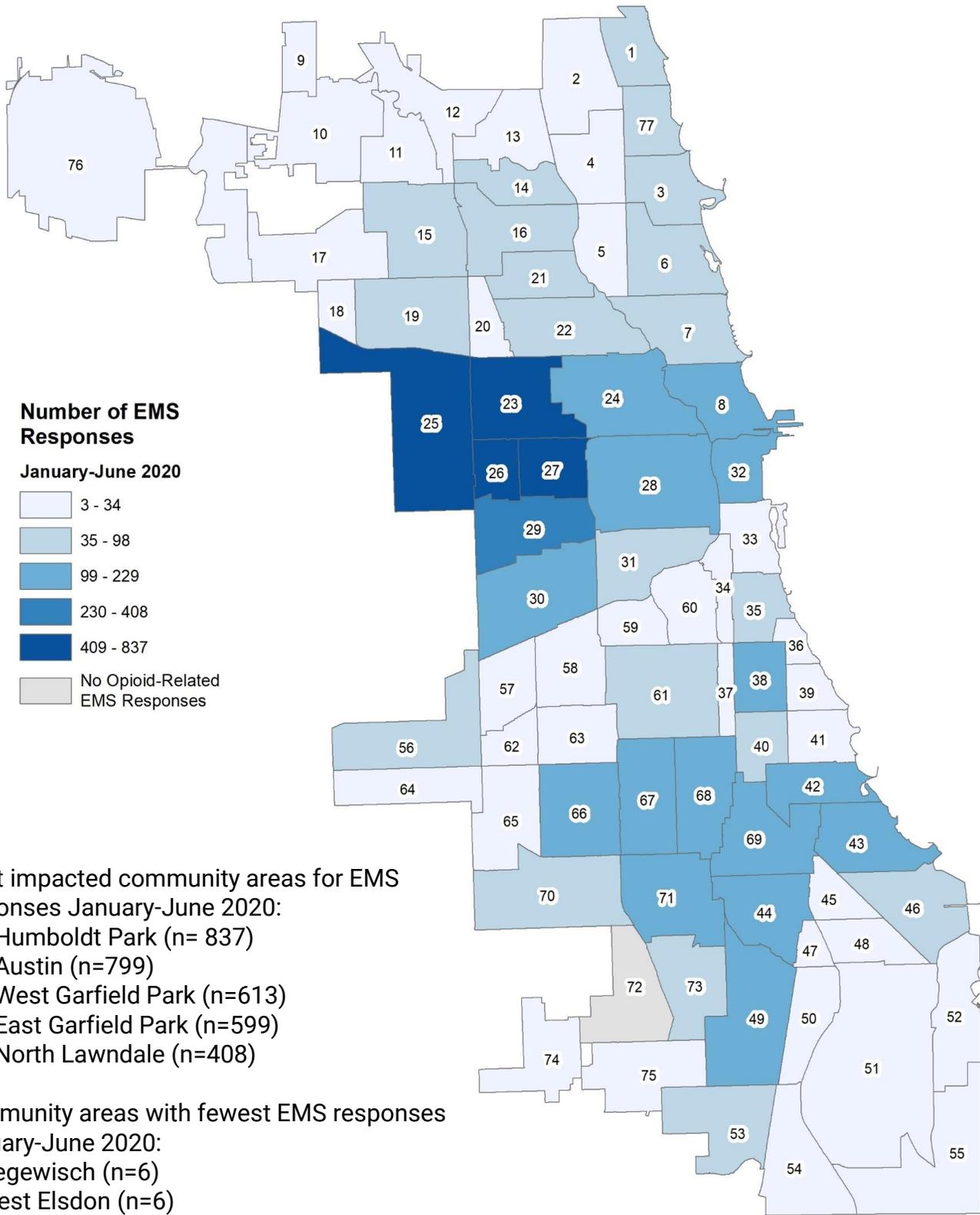
<sup>ii</sup> Rates are expressed as number of overdoses per 100,000 people in the population. Denominators are based on the 2010 census. Rates are age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

<sup>iii</sup> Opioid pain reliever: buprenorphine, codeine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, meperidine, morphine, oxycodone, oxymorphone, or tramadol. Opioid pain reliever-involved deaths may also have involved other substances including heroin, fentanyl, or cocaine.

<sup>iv</sup> In May, 3 deaths were missing race-ethnicity <sup>v</sup> In May, one death was missing data for age.

<sup>^</sup> For counts less than 20, rates may be unstable and should be interpreted with caution.

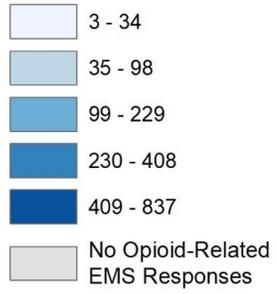
# CFD EMS response for opioid-related overdose by community area of incident, Chicago January-June 2020



- 1 Rogers Park
- 2 West Ridge
- 3 Uptown
- 4 Lincoln Square
- 5 North Center
- 6 Lakeview
- 7 Lincoln Park
- 8 Near North Side
- 9 Edison Park
- 10 Norwood Park
- 11 Jefferson Park
- 12 Forest Glen
- 13 North Park
- 14 Albany Park
- 15 Portage Park
- 16 Irving Park
- 17 Dunning
- 18 Montclare
- 19 Belmont Cragin
- 20 Hermosa
- 21 Avondale
- 22 Logan Square
- 23 Humboldt Park
- 24 West Town
- 25 Austin
- 26 West Garfield Park
- 27 East Garfield Park
- 28 Near West Side
- 29 North Lawndale
- 30 South Lawndale
- 31 Lower West Side
- 32 Loop
- 33 Near South Side
- 34 Armour Square
- 35 Douglas
- 36 Oakland
- 37 Fuller Park
- 38 Grand Boulevard
- 39 Kenwood
- 40 Washington Park
- 41 Hyde Park
- 42 Woodlawn
- 43 South Shore
- 44 Chatham
- 45 Avalon Park
- 46 South Chicago
- 47 Burnside
- 48 Calumet Heights
- 49 Roseland
- 50 Pullman
- 51 South Deering
- 52 East Side
- 53 West Pullman
- 54 Riverdale
- 55 Hegewisch
- 56 Garfield Ridge
- 57 Archer Heights
- 58 Brighton Park
- 59 McKinley Park
- 60 Bridgeport
- 61 New City
- 62 West Elsdon
- 63 Gage Park
- 64 Clearing
- 65 West Lawn
- 66 Chicago Lawn
- 67 West Englewood
- 68 Englewood
- 69 Greater Grand Crossing
- 70 Ashburn
- 71 Auburn Gresham
- 72 Beverly
- 73 Washington Heights
- 74 Mount Greenwood
- 75 Morgan Park
- 76 O'Hare
- 77 Edgewater

### Number of EMS Responses

January-June 2020



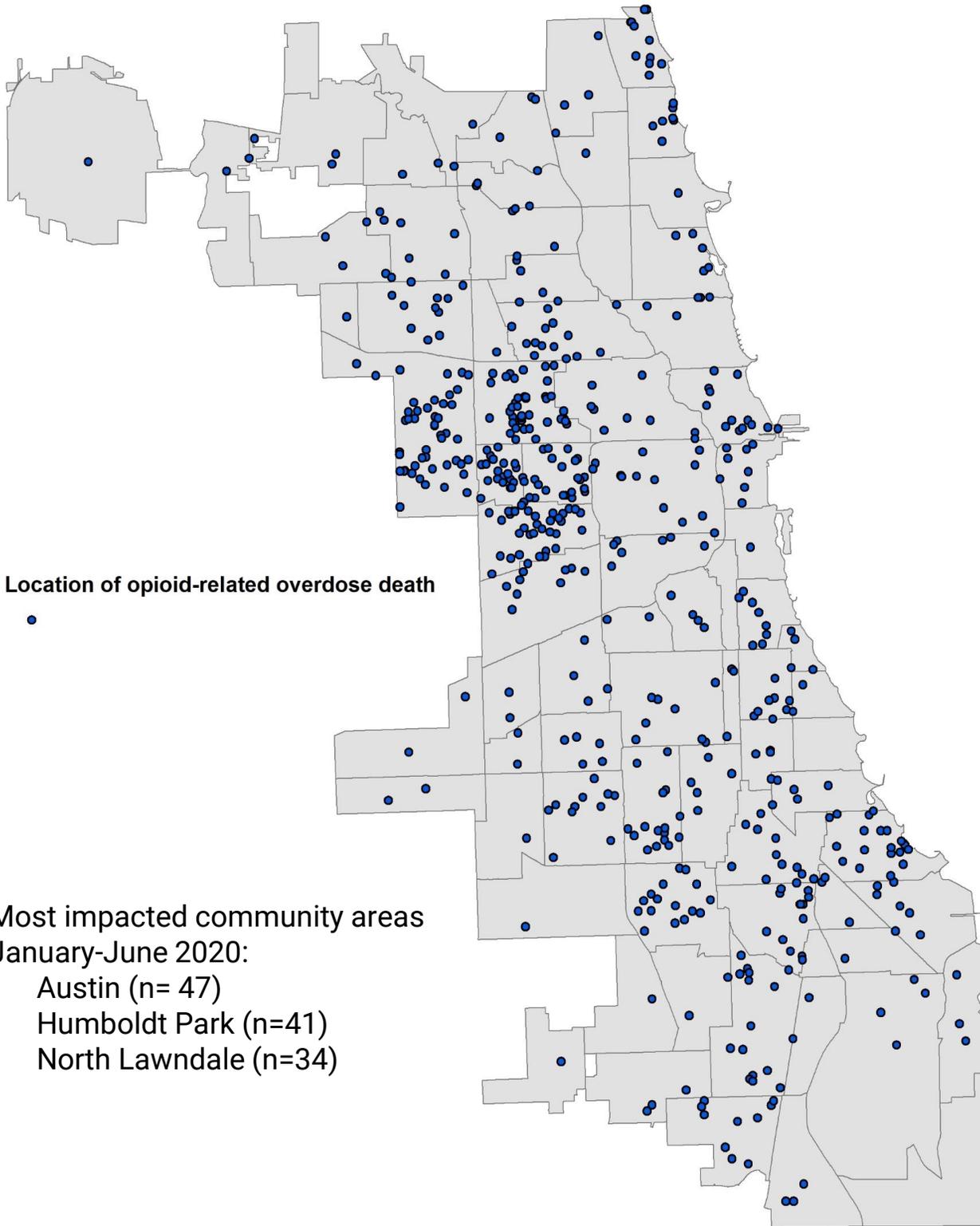
### Most impacted community areas for EMS responses January-June 2020:

- Humboldt Park (n= 837)
- Austin (n=799)
- West Garfield Park (n=613)
- East Garfield Park (n=599)
- North Lawndale (n=408)

### Community areas with fewest EMS responses January-June 2020:

- Hegewisch (n=6)
- West Elsdon (n=6)
- Forest Glen (fewer than 5)
- Mount Greenwood (fewer than 5)
- Edison Park (fewer than 5)

# Opioid-Related overdose deaths that occurred in Chicago, January-June 2020 (n=573)



Location of opioid-related overdose death



Most impacted community areas  
January-June 2020:

- Austin (n= 47)
- Humboldt Park (n=41)
- North Lawndale (n=34)

- 1 Rogers Park
- 2 West Ridge
- 3 Uptown
- 4 Lincoln Square
- 5 North Center
- 6 Lakeview
- 7 Lincoln Park
- 8 Near North Side
- 9 Edison Park
- 10 Norwood Park
- 11 Jefferson Park
- 12 Forest Glen
- 13 North Park
- 14 Albany Park
- 15 Portage Park
- 16 Irving Park
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- 57 Archer Heights
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- 70 Ashburn
- 71 Auburn Gresham
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- 73 Washington Heights
- 74 Mount Greenwood
- 75 Morgan Park
- 76 O'Hare
- 77 Edgewater



## News

**Cook County's Resources and Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19)****Cook County Addresses Dramatic Increase in 2020 Opioid Overdose Deaths**

July 14, 2020 Health

Today, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Cook County Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, and physicians from Cook County Health addressed the exponential increase in opioid overdose deaths this year.

“This year continues to showcase the dangerous consequences we face as a result of decades – centuries – of racial inequities,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “While much of this year has been consumed by our fight to contain COVID-19, which has disproportionately impacted our communities of color, we’ve had to contend with skyrocketing homicide rates which almost universally took the lives of Black and Brown people and we must face the devastating toll the opioid crisis is taking on our community as well.”

President Preckwinkle said these compounding public health crises showcase the existing inequities in our system and their disproportionate impact on the communities that already struggle with disinvestment, lack of resources, violence and poverty.

Cook County is on track to double the number of opioid-related deaths from 2019. While African Americans make up under 24 percent of the County’s population, they account for half of all opioid deaths in the County this year.

Last year, the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office confirmed 605 opioid overdose deaths between January 1 and July 13. This year, that number stands at 773. But that only tells part of the story. The Office is still awaiting results of 580 pending cases. According to Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, 70 – 80 percent of those cases will be confirmed as opioid overdoses. This means that there are already approximately 1,200 opioid toxicity deaths in Cook County this year.

In 2019, the Medical Examiner’s Office confirmed a total of 1,267 opioid overdose deaths. In 2018, the Office confirmed 1,148. The victims are overwhelmingly people of color. Of the 773 cases confirmed this year, 63 percent are Black or Latino. Forty-five to 54-year-olds are most likely to succumb to an opioid overdose, and 55- to 64-year-olds are second most likely to die from an opioid overdose. These age groups have consistently been the most vulnerable to opioid deaths over the past few years.

“Our Office is used to dealing with death, but we will never get used to the tragedy that each death represents,” said Arunkumar. “While we concentrate on our mission to establish the cause and manner of death for the cases that fall under our jurisdiction, we do not accept that they had to occur. These deaths are preventable, and we have a responsibility to do all we can to stop as many as we can.”

While opioid toxicity deaths have spiked, the emergency departments at Cook County Health have seen no uptick in opioid-related emergency room visits. Dr. Steve Aks, division chair of emergency medicine and toxicology at Cook County Health, said.

“This is extremely alarming because an opioid overdose patient will likely live if given naloxone in the ambulance and opioid overdose deaths in the emergency department are a rare event,” said Dr. Aks. “Due to the pandemic, we asked individuals to stay at home unless it is an emergency – an overdose is an emergency.”

One program that has gotten a more than 20 percent increase in participation is the medication assisted treatment program (MAT) at Cook County Health. MAT is a combination of FDA-approved medication and behavioral health support and considered the gold standard approach to substance use disorders treatment according to Dr. Juleigh Nowinski Konchak, MAT physician lead at Cook County Health. She says Cook County Health has adapted how it is caring for patients with substance abuse disorders during the pandemic.

“We are working to keep patients safe by breaking down barriers to access through telehealth visits, frequent team-based engagement and outreach, access to naloxone for overdose prevention, and longer prescription supplies to avoid disruptions in care,” said Dr. Nowinski Konchak.

To access data regarding opioid-related deaths in Cook County, visit the Medical Examiner’s [case archive](#) and [opioid map](#).

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## Agencies

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## Media Contacts

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**RICHARD A. JORGENSEN, MD, FACS**  
**CORONER**  
 DU PAGE COUNTY, ILLINOIS

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Thursday, August 20, 2020

**Public Safety Announcement: Surge in Overdose and Suicide Deaths Review First 6 Months of 2020.**

**Public Safety Announcement: Surge in Overdose and Suicide Deaths**

**Review First 6 Months of 2020.**

On Wednesday, May 13, 2020 DuPage County Coroner Richard Jorgensen, M.D. reported on preliminary data indicating an alarming increase in overdose deaths in DuPage County. This Public Service Announcement is a follow up to that initial report with an in-depth review of all deaths due to overdose in the first six (6) months of 2020, during the onset of Covid 19 shelter at home compared to the same period in 2019.

These overdoses deaths are particularly difficult because they represent the premature end of a life, made worse by the fact that the majority of fatal overdoses occur in the young; they leave family, friends and community with grief and inevitable questions of "what if".

A thorough investigation and review of every overdose case has been undertaken to understand the circumstances and cause of this rise in overdose deaths. Personal, demographic and toxicological information was collected and reviewed to identify trends on who and how these overdoses occurred in the hope of fostering a better understanding of the problem and identifying potential solutions both on a personal and societal level.

**Overdose Death Data:**

Overall Deaths 1/1/2019-6/30/2019 -46

Overall Deaths 1/1/2020-6/30/2020 -70 (52% increase)

**Age**

AGE	<19		20-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		60-69		Male	Female
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
All	1		25		20		10		9		5			70
PRE	0		6		4		2		4		1			17
COVID		0 0		6 0		3 1		0 2		3 1		1 0		
POST	1		19		16		8		5		4			53
COVID		0 1		16 3		10 6		7 1		4 1		2 2		

Pre Covid-19 Lockdown (76 days 42% of the time) = 17 overdoses

Post Covid-19 Lockdown (105 days 58% of the time) = 53 overdoses

**Ethnicity:**

(Numbers in parenthesis are DuPage County census data)

Caucasian (77.9%): #56 = 78.2 %

Black\* (4.6%) #6 = 8.7 %

Hispanic (13.3%): # 5 = 7.3 %

Asian (10.1%) #2 = 2.9 %

\* two of the African-American deceased were not residents of DuPage Co.

**Sex:**

Female =24%

Male =76%

In summary, the number of overdose deaths have increased by 52% over the same period in 2019. The majority of this increase was during the "Shelter at Home" COVID-19 period. In Jan/ Feb the number of overdoses were less than 2019, so the large increase was more profound in looking at the next four months. There were 17 OD's in the Pre-COVID time frame compared to 15 in the same time frame of 2019. During the COVID quarantine there were 53 deaths (30 during the same time frame of 2019). The age ranges continue to represent a majority of 20- and 30-year olds. However, there were 4 (four) persons in their 60's. The ethnic background parallels the makeup of DuPage County as cited in the 2010 census report. As in all previous evaluation's males were approximately 76% of those who died.

Dr Jorgensen stated "Evaluation of each case reveals a common thread. Almost every case of overdose revealed that the deceased person had a history of mental health issues, depression, personal, financial or marital problems, previous drug dependence or rehabilitation or were living alone. It is suggested by these findings that the most vulnerable in our society are being affected negatively by the COVID-19 shutdown and response to isolation and lack of treatment availability. I have reached out to multiple rehabilitation leaders and they confirm the increase in those seeking rehabilitation, drug use relapse and instances of fatal and non-fatal overdoses in their patients and community."

Nick Gore, a VP at The Indiana Center for Recovery stated, "We, and every other treatment facility that I know are filled to maximum capacity with long waiting lists. The quarantine has been devastating to those in treatment and continuing sobriety. Shelter at Home limits those in treatment and recovery the ability to meet with treatment professionals, sponsors or the society and companionship that is the bedrock for most treatment programs and continued sobriety."

Dr Jorgensen contacted to State's Attorney Bob Berlin to seek his perspective on this problem, Mr. Berlin stated, "The profound increase in overdose deaths documented by Coroner Jorgensen is a disturbing reminder that illegal narcotics continue to devastate our communities. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic we must continue to dedicate resources to combat the opioid epidemic and provide greater opportunities for treatment."

Coroner Jorgensen reiterated his conclusions: "It appears that an unforeseen collateral consequence of the stresses of "Shelter at Home" which resulted in isolation, lack of community and companionship is taking its toll on the most vulnerable of our society. If you know of people who are at high risk: known drug users those in rehabilitation, persons living alone, having personal, financial or marital difficulty, mental health issues or depression, please reach out (you can still wear masks and social distance) and talk to them and see if they need companionship, support or help. These are difficult times made worse when an individual has drug and/or mental health issues. We are all in this together and need to reach out to all of those who are vulnerable in this difficult time.

Overview of Suicide Data for the same period will be published in a later Public Service Announcement.

# Why the pandemic is leading to more opioid overdoses



Stacy Harding, of the nonprofit Live4Lali, works Wednesday inside the Stigma Crusher, a van that offers free harm reduction supplies for people who use drugs. The van, which is stocked with naloxone, fentanyl test strips and clean syringes, is parked each Wednesday afternoon at AJM Auto Body in McHenry and each Thursday afternoon at 10th Street and McAlister Avenue in Waukegan. ( *John Starks | Staff Photographer* )



**Marie Wilson**

Posted

7/16/2020 5:30 AM

Opioid overdose deaths could reach record levels this year in Cook, Lake and DuPage counties as the COVID-19 pandemic adds several factors that contribute to drug-related fatalities.

Drug prevention advocates were uneasy when overdose deaths across the six-county region, excluding Chicago, rose to 769 last year from 707 in 2018.

Now the toll appears on track to be even worse, two suburban coroners and Cook County public health officials say.

Suburban Cook County has seen 204 confirmed opioid overdose deaths through July 1, according to the medical examiner's online case archive (<https://datacatalog.cookcountyl.gov/Public-Safety/Medical-Examiner-Case-Archive/cjeq-bs86/data>), putting it on pace for 408 total deaths this year.

Last year's death toll was a record 376 in Cook County communities excluding Chicago. And medical examiner's figures show there are 148 pending cases that could make those numbers even worse.

Chief Medical Examiner Ponni Arunkumar said in a news release that 70% to 80% of pending cases are expected to be confirmed as overdoses, meaning there already have been roughly 307 to 322 overdose deaths in Cook County suburbs.

Countywide, Cook has recorded 773 opioid overdose deaths so far this year, compared to 605 during the same period last year.

Including 70% to 80% of 508 total pending cases countywide, Cook County already has seen roughly 1,200 opioid toxicity deaths, Arunkumar estimates.

Last year's total countywide was 1,267.

Officials also are troubled by the fact that 63% of the 773 people who have died this year from confirmed opioid overdoses are Black or

Latino.

Suburban officials in Lake and DuPage counties are expressing similar concerns about rising overdose totals.

Lake County already has recorded 42 confirmed opioid overdose deaths, Coroner Howard Cooper said, and is on pace to reach 84 -- topping last year's record of 77.

That's without including 23 cases that were pending as of July 1. Cooper said many of those likely will prove to be overdoses as well.

"We're way ahead of where we were last year," he said.

DuPage County has recorded 52 overdose deaths, with about 47 involving opioids, Coroner Richard Jorgensen said.

The pace would put the county at 94 deaths for the year, but that's without roughly 25 pending cases, many of which Jorgensen said could prove to be overdoses.

There were 96 opioid overdose deaths in the county last year -- only two below its peak of 98 in 2018.

"If we keep on this track, we're way ahead of last year's numbers," Jorgensen said.

The news is slightly better elsewhere. McHenry County is roughly in line with last year's pace, while counts in Will and Kane counties could drop, depending on the number and outcome of pending cases.

Experts caution that several factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to increase the number of people who fall victim to

overdoses.

"The situation is dire," said Chelsea Laliberte Barnes, founder and executive director of Live4Lali, which works to reduce stigma and prevent substance use disorder. "The fallout of what happened with the quarantine is going to be pretty bad ... for people's mental health and people's livelihoods, and that is not a good recipe."

One key factor is isolation and all the ripple effects it causes. In isolation, experts with Linden Oaks Behavioral Health in Naperville say, people who use opioids are more likely to use alone. That means they're less likely to be in the presence of anyone who could step in with a dose of the antidote Narcan or naloxone.

"When you think about people with addiction, you don't want them isolated," Lake County's Cooper said. "They need people's help to get through this."

In isolation, people in recovery are unable to access the communal groups they form to help maintain sobriety, at least in the in-person manner many say is most effective.

The alumni network from Gateway Foundation treatment centers is seeing many people worried about falling back into old habits, said Jim Wright, director of alumni services.

He called the pandemic "a big roadblock to staying sober."

Coroners agree.

"The COVID crisis has taken away all of those options and really put people that are in treatment, in rehab or in recovery at tremendous risk," DuPage's Jorgensen said.

Stimulus cash brought another risk, Linden Oaks experts said, because "having a large amount of money can be a dangerous temptation."

And then there's the issue of supply. Laliberte Barnes said some users might have to turn to unfamiliar dealers because their regular suppliers got sick. A new dealer might sell street drugs like heroin at a stronger potency, which could cause an overdose if used in a typical amount.

"We, as a state, have to recognize that drug use is not an uncommon action and we need to be getting ahead of it when it comes to educating people on how to use safely," Laliberte Barnes said.

The overarching problem with the pandemic's effects on the opioid crisis is one of priorities, experts say.

The public health field has shifted so much of its muscle toward decreasing the spread of the virus and ramping up contact tracing that little remains to battle opioid overdoses.

"I feel, as always, we can do a lot more," Laliberte Barnes said. "We can't just give up on it because we have other priorities."

Her organization has restarted its mobile outreach (<https://live4lali.org/harmreductionoutreach/>) with a purple truck called the Stigma Crusher available weekly in McHenry and Waukegan.

The truck provides safe use supplies including clean syringes, tourniquets and snorting kits, naloxone, fentanyl test strips and pill disposal equipment, as well as toiletries, bottled water, masks, nonperishable food, hand sanitizer, bags and safe sex supplies -- all free of cost and questions.

Live4Lali also offers a delivery service for safe use supplies to anyone in suburban Cook, DuPage, Lake and McHenry counties, available nearly 24 hours a day by texting (224) 297-4393.

To Jorgensen, the best way anyone can help in the fight against the pandemic's effects on opioid overdoses is to reach out. He said the majority of people who died from overdoses confirmed during a spike in DuPage this spring were suffering from isolation, depression or a history of addiction and relapses.

"The only thing I say we can do is to reach out to people that we know are hurting," Jorgensen said, "and try to help these people during this critical time."

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## COVID-19 pandemic hard on those treated for opioid addiction in Will County

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By **ALEX ORTIZ**[Email](#)[Follow](#)

July 20, 2020

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The measures taken to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus have hit those recovering from an opioid addiction especially hard, local experts said.

Kathleen Burke, director of substance use initiatives in the Will County Executive's Office, said the pandemic hasn't resulted in fewer opioid overdose deaths.

"This year is going to be particularly bad because of the lockdown," she said.

There have been 34 people who've died from an opioid overdose in Will County through the first half of the year, according to Burke's count. She said the Will County Coroner's Office is still processing more potential overdose deaths, so that number could go up.

Overdose deaths in Will County were already [on the rise](#) largely because of the increase in the use of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid typically used to treat severe pain.

She's also said she's recorded about 34 overdoses treated with naloxone, the medication used to reverse opioid overdoses, so far this year. That's likely an undercount because not all those who survive an overdose report it and fewer may have gone to a hospital while COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations were on the rise, Burke said.

The stay-at-home order and sudden cessation of normal business made it hard for drug addicts to get or stay in treatment. Treatment facilities couldn't take in new patients, and outpatient services could no longer take place in person, Burke said.

"People were not prepared for that, and we found that they were relapsing and overdosing," she said.

Burke said the sudden changes were "extremely disruptive" for many patients, especially those who relied on a routine during treatment, like seeing a therapist for regular in-person visits.

She also highlighted the impact on treatment centers and has said the county government should help them with the money it received via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

Paul Lauridsen, the executive director of Stepping Stones in Joliet, said that during the shutdown his facility could see only about a third of the patients it typically sees. He said he worried about patients who relied on Stepping Stones services such as group therapy sessions that had to stop during the pandemic.

Burke said she hopes public officials do more to address the dual crises.

“We need to think about behavioral health,” she said. “And think about the challenges we’ve created because of the virus.”

Watch Burke’s interview with The Herald-News at [theherald-news.com/video](https://theherald-news.com/video).

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