



November 2016 Report: Rhode Island Multidisciplinary Review of Drug Overdose Death Evaluation Team (MODE) Team

Quarterly Trends¹

- For the first 6 months of 2016, there were 177 unintentional drug overdose deaths in Rhode Island, compared with 154 in the first 6 months of 2015. This represents a 15% increase, although this is less than the 31.6% increase seen across the same months from 2014 to 2015.
- Illicit drugs, either solely or in combination with prescription drugs or alcohol, were associated with 83.3% of all unintentional drug overdose deaths thus far in 2016.
- Fentanyl is involved a majority of overdose deaths and continues to climb. To date this year, 57% of overdoses are attributed to fentanyl (154 out of 270), with increases most notably in the second (62.2%) and third (62.9%) quarters.
- 73.3% of unintentional drug overdose deaths in 2016 have been among males, with 26.7% among females. Compared to 2015, there are slightly fewer deaths involving females in 2016 (28.3% females 2015).
- Overdose deaths are more often of younger (25-34 years old) or older (50+ years old) age. Overdose deaths involving young people (25-34 years old) nearly doubled since 2009, from 16% (2009) to 30% (2016).
- So far in 2016, 93.7% of the unintentional drug overdose deaths have been among whites, 4.4% among blacks.

Emergent Themes

- Overdoses involving more than one type of fentanyl (such as fentanyl, acetylfentanyl) are increasing. This was not concentrated geographically. The MODE team recommends tracking this in the next few quarters.
- Pregnant women who use illicit opioids are at high risk of fentanyl exposure, and to fetal and maternal death. Universal screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment for opioid use disorder for women of childbearing age is indicated.

Recommendations for Structural or Community Prevention

- Clearer emergency department protocols are needed for discharge management of individuals who are treated for a drug overdose
- Partner and family-specific messaging and prevention counseling is indicated for use post-overdose and in the emergency department
- Overdose surveillance should consider tracking pregnancy and post-partum status of victims and decedents
- Expand peer recovery support specialist capacity for pregnant and postpartum women who use opioids

Rapid Response Recommendations

The MODE Team recommends community-based rapid response projects focused in two areas: (1) fentanyl awareness and outreach to young adults (≤ 30 years of age) who use heroin or cocaine, and (2) a partner and family communications package on overdose prevention and naloxone, for use in post-overdose counseling.

Summary: Rhode Island continues to see high rates of fatal opioid overdoses, with fentanyl associated with more than 50% of deaths in 2016. Younger (under 34 years) and older (over 50 years) people who use drugs appear to be most affected. During the first half of 2016, a concerning number of overdoses involved multiple types of fentanyl and affected women, including pregnant women, but many people interact with emergency healthcare providers prior to fatal overdose. Opportunities for rapid response projects focused on these populations and settings are indicated.