



# Epidemiology Brief

Opioid Related Overdose Deaths  
in Cook County, IL, 2015

May 2017

---

## Epidemiology Brief: Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths in Cook County, IL, 2015 May 2017

In 2015, there were a total of 647 drug overdose deaths involving opioids in Cook County, IL. Of those, 426 were in Chicago and 221 were in suburban Cook County. The rate of overdose deaths involving opioids in Chicago (15.5 per 100,000) was above the national rate (10.4 per 100,000)<sup>1</sup> and was 1.7 times higher than the rate in suburban Cook County (8.8 per 100,000).

The rate of opioid-related drug overdose death was higher among men than among women for both Chicago and suburban Cook County. The rate of opioid related-drug overdose death was highest among older individuals (age 55-64) in Chicago, but highest among younger individuals (age 25-34) in suburban Cook County (Table 1).

***Heroin was the opioid involved in the majority of overdose deaths in both Chicago and Suburban Cook County.***

In both Chicago and Suburban Cook County, heroin was the opioid involved in the majority of overdose deaths (Table 2). However, the percentage of opioid-related overdose deaths involving opioid pain relievers in suburban Cook County (20.4%) was 2.7 times higher than the percentage in Chicago (7.5%).

### Data and Methods

These data were obtained and analyzed through a partnership of the Chicago

Department of Public Health, Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, Cook County Department of Public Health, and Cook County Health and Hospitals System. Overdose death data were obtained directly from the Medical Examiner's Office, and then processed and analyzed collaboratively to gain a nuanced understanding of overdose deaths in Cook County. The agencies reviewed individual overdose cases as well as categorization methodology with the Medical Examiner to ensure standardization of data analysis.

**Table 1. Opioid-related overdose deaths in Cook County, IL\* (2015)**

Drug Type**	Chicago Population: 2,695,598		Suburban Cook Population: 2,499,077	
	Number	Rate***	Number	Rate***
All opioids	426	15.5	221	8.8
Heroin-involved	345	12.4	152	6.2
Fentanyl-involved	71	2.7	32	1.3
Opioid Pain Reliever-involved <sup>^</sup>	32	1.1	45	1.7
Methadone-involved	28	1.0	19	0.8 <sup>+</sup>
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	322	23.8	149	12.0
Female	104	7.5	72	5.6
<b>Age</b>				
15-24	27	6.7	20	6.1
25-34	78	15.1	62	19.6
35-44	89	23.5	42	12.7
45-54	121	35.7	52	13.7
55-64	96	36.5	39	12.7
65-74	14	9.3 <sup>+</sup>	<5	++

Data Source: Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, US Census Bureau.

\*Geographic designations are based on address of incident.

\*\*Drug type categories are not mutually exclusive as some deaths involved more than one type of opioid.

\*\*\* Rates express the number of overdoses per 100,000 people in the population. Denominators are based on the 2010 census population. Rates are age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

<sup>^</sup> Opioid pain reliever: buprenorphine, codeine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, meperidine, morphine, oxycodone, oxymorphone, or tramadol.

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

<sup>++</sup>For counts less than 5, rates are not reported.

**Table 2. Percentage of all opioid related overdose deaths involving specific opioids (2015)**

Drug Type*	Chicago (n=426)	Suburban Cook (n=221)
Heroin-involved	80.9%	68.8%
Fentanyl-involved	16.7%	14.5%
Opioid Pain Reliever-involved <sup>^</sup>	7.5%	20.4%
Methadone-involved	6.6%	8.6%

Data Source: Cook County Medical Examiner's Office.

\*Categories are not mutually exclusive as some deaths involved more than one type of opioid. Percentages will not add to 100%

<sup>^</sup>Opioid pain reliever: buprenorphine, codeine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, meperidine, morphine, oxycodone, oxymorphone, or tramadol.

## Current Public Health Response Efforts

In addition to the important ongoing work by community based organizations, hospitals, clinicians, researchers, volunteers, and many others to address the opioid crisis, Chicago and Cook County are pursuing the following initiatives:

<b>Joint Efforts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH), Cook County Health and Hospital Systems (CCHHS) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) are working together to analyze available data sources, share information about opioid-related trends, and collaborate with the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office.</li> <li>Chicago and Cook County worked together to convene the Chicago-Cook Heroin Task Force, which engaged a variety of local leaders, community agencies and academic experts and developed a list of recommendations that was released in October 2016. The analysis completed in this report is a result of the recommendations set forth by the data section of the task force.</li> <li>CDPH and CCHHS jointly provide buprenorphine trainings to medical providers interested in prescribing this form of medication-assisted treatment.</li> <li>Naloxone is a medication that can reverse opioid overdose and save someone’s life. CCHHS, CDPH, and CCDPH are working to make naloxone accessible to all family and friends of opioid users who may be at risk of overdosing, as well as to all patients prescribed opioids. Naloxone is available at all CCHHS pharmacies.</li> </ul>
<b>Chicago</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CDPH is planning a community awareness campaign to increase awareness about opioid risk, opioid use disorder treatment, overdose response, and naloxone administration.</li> <li>CDPH provides educational events for medical professionals. These focus on safe opioid prescribing practices for pain management, practical strategies for working with patients with opioid use disorder, and evidence-based treatment. CDPH is launching a learning collaborative for health centers that want to build capacity for medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder.</li> <li>Since 2016, the City of Chicago has provided \$250,000 annually for overdose reversal training and naloxone distribution in the community.</li> <li>In 2017, the City of Chicago added \$700,000 annually to the \$1.7 million that is already spent annually on substance use disorder prevention and treatment. The new funds will be awarded through a competitive process to agencies that provide medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder treatment.</li> </ul>
<b>Cook County</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CCHHS and CCDPH are working with medical providers to improve and develop safe prescribing protocols, including an annual training module.</li> <li>CCHHS currently offers medication-assisted treatment (MAT) at many of its community health centers and partners with three community health centers – Esperanza Health Centers, PrimeCare Community Health, and Heartland Health Centers – to offer MAT within their primary care clinics.</li> <li>CCHHS invested \$3 million to establish a Community Triage Center (CTC) in Chicago to provide evaluation, crisis stabilization and treatment for patients presenting with psychiatric and/or substance-related crises.</li> <li>CCDPH facilitates a panel of opioid addiction experts to provide awareness and education training on opioid addiction throughout the community as well as its own workforce.</li> <li>In 2017, CCHHS will receive \$2.6 million to establish new pilot programs to fight the county opioid epidemic. Programs will include a second Community Triage Center, expansion of the system’s medication assisted treatment options and case management services, and new fentanyl screening capabilities. Funding in support of these initiatives was awarded to CCHHS by the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (IDHS-DASA). These funds are part of an Opioid-State Targeted Response (STR) grant award (TI-080231) to IDHS-DASA from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as part of the 21st Century Cures Act.</li> <li>Through CCHHS’ Cermak Health Services at the Cook County jail, detainees with a history of opioid use are offered training and naloxone upon release to reduce the incidence of post-detox overdose.</li> </ul>

### General Resources for Opioid Addiction:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline: 800.662.HELP(4357)
- For SAMHSA’s Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator click [HERE](#)
- For questions about medications, call the Illinois Poison Center at 800.222.1222
- For information about safe disposal of medications click [HERE](#)
- IL Department of Human Services Consumer (DHS) Hotline: 866.213.0548

For more detail on opioids in Chicago click [HERE](#).

For more detail on opioids in Suburban Cook County click [HERE](#)

For more detail on opioids from the Cook County Health & Hospitals System click [HERE](#)

CDPH, CCDPH, and CCHHS would like to thank Dr. Ponnir Arunkumar, Cook County Chief Medical Examiner, for her invaluable assistance in obtaining and understanding the data presented in this brief.