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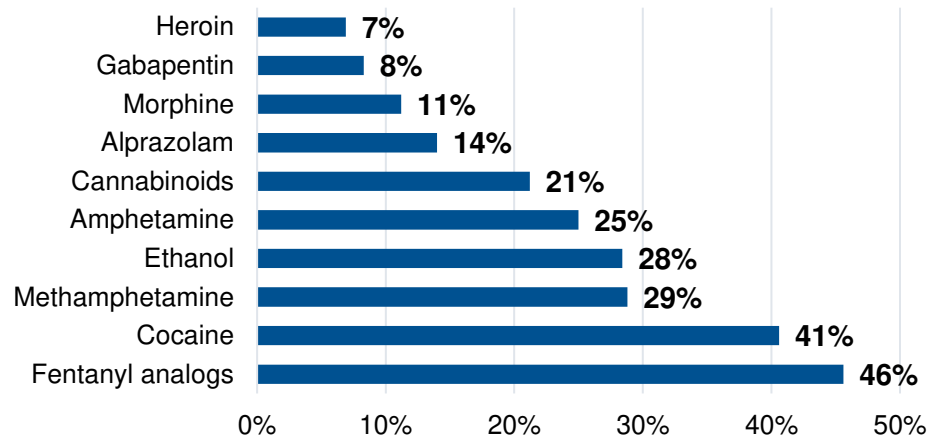
Polysubstance Use among Florida Decedents, 2021

Polysubstance use is the use of two or more psychoactive substances. It can include intentional combinations as well as unintentional, such as when a person takes a substance that is adulterated (mixed or laced) or contaminated by the manufacturer with another drug. Polysubstance use is increasing across the U.S., and data from the Centers for Disease Control note that half of all drug overdose deaths involved multiple substances. Moreover, the contamination of drugs with fentanyl has increased the risk of overdose among many people who use drugs.

Data from 2021 illustrate this trend in Florida. That year, there were 5,791 fentanyl-cause deaths, of which 95% involved more than one substance. Data for other drug-caused deaths are similar and show that the percentage of deaths involving multiple substances is high: cocaine (91%), methamphetamine (98%), and heroin (100%). Thus, it is safe to assume that polysubstance use is the norm, not the exception.

As an example, the graph above shows the substances co-occurring among fentanyl-caused deaths. A range of substances are present, including stimulants (cocaine, methamphetamine, and amphetamine), other opioids (fentanyl analogs, morphine, and heroin), a depressant (alcohol), a sedative (alprazolam), and an anti-convulsant (gabapentin). It is important to note that polysubstance use carries many risks. Combinations of stimulants and depressants may yield unpredictable results, placing users at higher risk of overdose or other serious health problems, such as heart attack, brain injury, or stroke. Intentional or unintentional combinations of fentanyl with other drugs are also dangerous, especially for users who are opioid-naïve and unaware that a substance has been laced with fentanyl. Moreover, although not on the list above, xylazine (a non-FDA approved sedative typically used in animals) is increasingly being found among fentanyl-caused deaths throughout Florida and can cause many harms to users including necrosis and increased risk of overdose.

Top Co-Occurring Substances among Fentanyl-Caused Deaths in Florida, 2021



Sources: Florida Drug-Related Outcomes Surveillance & Tracking System, <https://frost.med.ufl.edu/frost/>
CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/polysubstance-use/index.html>, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/other-drugs.html>

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