

## Opioid-Related Overdose Deaths in Cook County, IL, 2017- 2018 | September 2020

In 2018, there were 1,121 opioid-related overdose deaths in Cook County: 793 in Chicago, and 328 in suburban Cook County (SCC). While the death rate in Chicago (28.7 per 100,000 individuals) was substantially higher than the Illinois rate (17.0 per 100,000), the SCC rate (13.2 per 100,000) was lower than the state rate. In 2018, the national death rate was 14.7 per 100,000 people.

- The rate of overdose deaths involving fentanyl was higher than the rate of deaths involving other types of opioids in 2018 in SCC. In Chicago, this rate increased from 17.1 in 2017 to 22.5 per 100,000 in 2018. In SCC, it increased from 7.9 in 2017 to 9.1 per 100,000 in 2018.
- As in previous joint reports, the rate of opioid-related overdose deaths in Chicago was highest among Black individuals compared to other racial/ethnic groups: Blacks were about 2 to 3 times more likely to die than White or Hispanic individuals, respectively. The rate was highest in the 45-64 age group compared to other age groups. Men had rates that were over 3.5 times higher than those of women.
- In SCC, the rate of opioid-related overdose deaths was highest among White individuals compared to other racial/ethnic groups. The rate was highest in the 25-34 age group and men had rates that were 2.4 times higher than those of women.
- The percentage of overdose deaths involving opioid pain relievers in SCC (21.6%) was more than 4.3 times the percentage in Chicago (5.0%). There was an 8.8% increase in pain reliever deaths in SCC but a 54.4% decrease in Chicago.

In 2018, fentanyl was the drug involved in most overdose deaths in SCC (67.3%), a 24.6% increase from 2017. Deaths involving heroin (61.4%) were highest in Chicago but decreased by 15% from the previous year. SCC had an 8.4% decrease in heroin-involved deaths. Methadone-involved deaths decreased 30.2% in Chicago but increased by 19.7% in SCC. Methadone-involved deaths are a small percentage of overdose deaths, and overdose deaths often involve multiple substances.

**Table 1. Opioid-related overdose deaths – Cook County, IL (2017 – 2018)**

Drug Type <sup>i</sup>	Chicago Population: 2,695,598				Suburban Cook County Population: 2,499,077			
	2017		2018		2017		2018	
	#	Rate <sup>ii</sup>	#	Rate <sup>ii</sup>	#	Rate <sup>ii</sup>	#	Rate <sup>ii</sup>
All opioids	796	29.1	793	28.7	357	14.5	328	13.2
Heroin-involved	575	21.0	487	18.9	234	9.4	197	8.0
Fentanyl-involved*	470	17.1	420	22.5	193	7.9	221	9.1
Opioid pain reliever-involved <sup>iii</sup>	86	3.2	40	2.5	71	2.8	71	2.7
Methadone-involved <sup>iv</sup>	68	2.6	48	2.6	20	0.8	22	0.8
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	615	46.2	612	46.6	264	22.0	229	18.9
Female	179	13.0	183	12.9	93	7.3	99	7.9
<b>Race-Ethnicity<sup>v</sup></b>								
Black	403	43.6	427	45.5	74	18.0	64	15.3
White	293	29.7	244	24.6	256	19.9	232	18.0
Hispanic or Latino	96	13.3	121	15.8	23	5.2	31	6.6
Asian or Pacific Islander	<5	++	<5	++	<5	++	<5	++
<b>Age</b>								
15-24	34	8.4	38	9.4	35	10.7	31	9.5
25-34	132	25.6	135	26.2	100	31.6	90	28.5
35-44	155	41.0	152	40.2	84	25.3	79	23.8
45-54	249	73.5	224	66.1	76	20.1	69	18.2
55-64	186	70.8	204	76.9	52	17.0	53	17.3
65-74	35	23.2	39	25.8	7	4.0+	6	3.5+

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

**Note:** Geographic designations are based on address of incident, 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 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>iii</sup> Opioid pain reliever: buprenorphine, codeine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, meperidine, morphine, oxycodone, oxymorphone, or tramadol. Although buprenorphine is included in this category, it is not possible to determine if it was prescribed for pain or opioid use disorder treatment, as it is approved for both.

<sup>iv</sup> It is not possible to determine if methadone was prescribed for pain, dispensed for opioid use disorder treatment, or used illicitly.

\* The Cook County Medical Examiner's office began routinely testing for fentanyl involvement in June 2015. For this reason, the actual number of fentanyl-involved overdose deaths in 2015 may be greater than reported.

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

++ For counts less than 5, rates are not reported.

**Table 2. Percentage of all opioid-related overdose deaths involving specific opioids – Cook County, IL (2018)**

Drug Type <sup>i</sup>	Chicago n=793	Suburban Cook County n=328
Heroin-involved	61.4%	60.0%
Fentanyl-involved	53.0%	67.3%
Opioid pain reliever-involved <sup>ii</sup>	5.0%	21.6%
Methadone-involved <sup>iii</sup>	6.1%	6.7%

**Data Source:** Cook County Medical Examiner's Office.

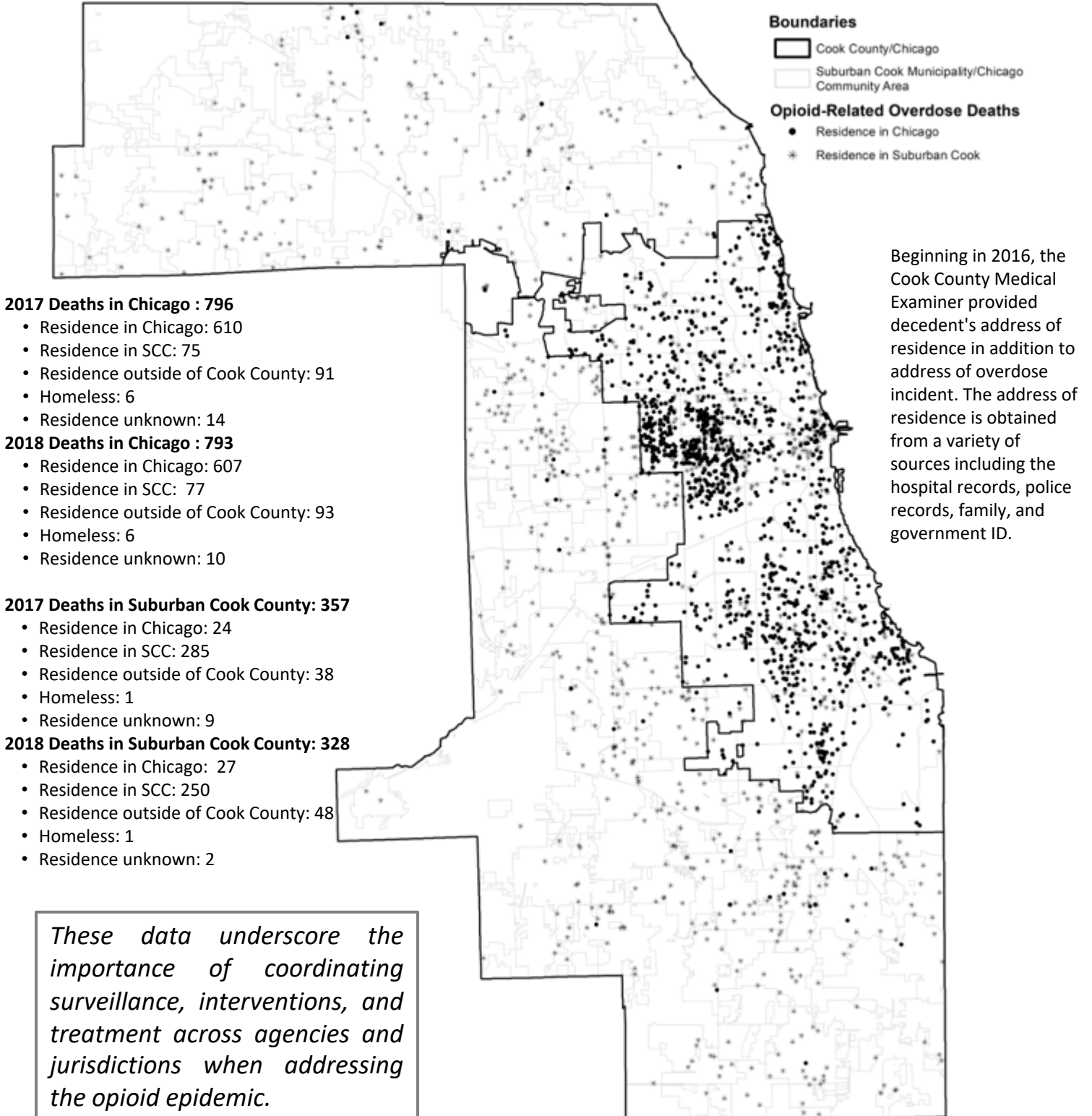
**Note:** Geographic designations are based on address of incident, regardless of decedent's address of residence.

<sup>i</sup> Categories are not mutually exclusive as some deaths involved more than one type of opioid. Percentages will not add to 100%.

<sup>ii</sup> Opioid pain reliever: buprenorphine, codeine, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, meperidine, morphine, oxycodone, oxymorphone, or tramadol. Although buprenorphine is included in this category, it is not possible to determine if it was prescribed for pain or opioid use disorder treatment, as it is approved for both.

<sup>iii</sup> It is not possible to determine if methadone was prescribed for pain, dispensed for opioid use disorder treatment, or used illicitly.

**Map 1. Location of fatal opioid-related overdoses by decedent's address of residence - 2017-2018 Cook County, IL**



## 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:

### Joint Efforts

- The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH), Cook County Health (CCH) 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.
- Chicago and Cook County worked together to convene the Chicago-Cook Heroin Task Force, which engaged local leaders, community agencies and academic experts and developed a list of recommendations that was released in October 2016. The analysis in this report is a result of the recommendations set forth by the data section of the task force.
- CDPH and CCH jointly provide buprenorphine waiver trainings to medical providers interested in prescribing medications for addiction treatment (MAT). MAT is commonly referred to as medications for opioid use disorder or medication-assisted-treatment.
- Naloxone is a medication that can reverse opioid overdose and save someone’s life. CCH, CDPH, and CCDPH are working to ensure naloxone availability to all individuals who use opioids, both prescribed and illicit, in addition to their families and friends. Naloxone is available at all CCH pharmacies.

### CDPH

- In 2018 and 2019, CDPH funded a variety of substance use services across Chicago. These settings include outpatient, opiate maintenance therapy, detoxification, residential rehabilitation units, recovery homes, and long-term services. Funding was also provided to distribute naloxone kits and conduct overdose reversal training.
- In 2019 CDPH was awarded a 3-year \$3.3 million grant by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The grant will allow for use of local data to prioritize the most impacted communities and institutions in Cook County, partnering to improve existing prevention and response efforts, increase linkage to evidence-based treatment, and promote awareness of best practices among healthcare providers and the public.
- In 2019 CDPH and CCDPH in partnership with the Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) launched the Hospital Opioid Treatment and Response Learning Collaborative and associated hospital demonstration projects. This learning collaborative facilitated a peer to peer learning to exchange best practices in initiating Medication for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)/MAT, naloxone distribution, and linkage to community-based addiction treatment from the emergency department and inpatient hospital settings. Staff from nine hospitals participated and the goal is to expand on this work in the upcoming year.
- CDPH continued its Pharmaceutical Licensing program to support efforts to prevent deceptive practices in drug marketing as well as provide greater oversight, monitoring, and accountability of prescription marketing. Pharmaceutical representatives are required to receive additional ethics training and continuing education classes each year. Upon request, marketers will also be required to track and disclose to the City their interactions with health care professionals, including gifts and payments. CDPH currently has 1,023 licensed pharmaceutical representatives in Chicago.

### Cook County Health

- As of December 2019, all of CCH’s 14 adult-serving community health centers offer primary care-based, team-based MAT. A state grant funds recovery coaches at the health centers and emergency department, and provides warm handoffs for further care.
- Beginning in August 2016, through CCH Cermak Health Services at the Cook County Jail, detainees with a history of opioid use are offered training and naloxone upon release to reduce post-discharge overdose. As of July 2020, over 7,800 individuals have received training and 6,100 naloxone kits have been distributed.
- Through funding from the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) and CDPH, Cermak Health Services implemented a program that administers MAT medications to inmates at Cook County Jail who are identified through screening. Upon discharge, patients receive care coordination from CCH staff, who assist with linkage to behavioral health services and continued MAT in the community.
- A CCH partnership with the Cook County Adult Probation Department has embedded social workers in adult probation. The social workers screen and refer to care for for substance use disorder and mental health needs. CCH is also working with the Cook County Sheriff’s Office to create warm hand-offs to community-based care for individuals in the electronic monitoring program and in pre-trial services. Both initiatives are funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Justice.
- CCH, along with criminal justice and public health stakeholders, has embarked on two data-driven projects that will inform efforts to prevent opioid overdose: first, to improve data linkages to the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office to help with early identification of emerging issues, and to better understand the risk for overdose mortality among adults in the probation program.
- CCH is also working to improve transitions to community-based substance use treatment for women returning home from Illinois Department of Corrections facilities.

### CCDPH

- In 2019, CCDPH secured \$4.7 million in grant funding to prevent opioid overdose deaths and increase access to and use of evidence-based substance use treatment programs. Through grant support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), CCDPH will provide training to suburban Cook County law enforcement and community partners on opioid overdose. By establishing regional taskforces and deploying outreach coordinators, the initiative will support deflection programs to route individuals with opioid use disorders to community-based treatment providers.
- CCDPH is a sub-grantee on a grant awarded to the CDPH by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The grant will enable CCDPH to significantly expand opioid overdose surveillance and implement law enforcement assisted diversion to treatment.
- CCDPH received support from DHS to educate providers about the CDC’s Safe Prescribing Guidelines, the dangers of sudden tapers and discontinuations of opioids, and the Prescription Monitoring Program, which tracks prescriptions of opioids to prevent over-prescribing. DHS funding was used to raise public awareness about naloxone and the Illinois Helpline for Opioids and Other Substances. In 2019, CCDPH aired the “Naloxone Saves Lives” commercial, featuring the Chicago Recovery Alliance and Live4Lali.

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**General Resources for Opioid Addiction:**

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) national helpline: 1-800-662-HELP(4357)
- SAMHSA's behavioral health treatment services locator: [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)
- Information on opioids in Chicago ([overcomeopioids.org](http://overcomeopioids.org)) and Cook County (<http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org/behavioral-health/opioids>)
- Illinois treatment finder resource line (1-833-2FINDHELP)
- IL Department of Human Services Consumer (DHS) Hotline: 1-866-213-0548