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## **OVERDOSE DEATHS ACCELERATING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC, EXPANDED PREVENTION EFFORTS NEEDED**

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**PASCO COUNTY, Fla.** – The Florida Department of Health in Pasco County (DOH-Pasco) continues efforts to prevent opioid overdoses, which have increased in Pasco County amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pasco County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) reported a total of 1,491 overdoses in 2020, resulting in 268 deaths – a 71% increase from 2019.

In Sept. 2019, Pasco County was awarded the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Overdose Data to Action Grant for \$638,400 to assist in decreasing the opioid epidemic in the area. The Florida Department of Health in Pasco County (DOH-Pasco) has partnered with PCSO and Pasco County Schools, and hired an opioid epidemiologist as part of the Florida Epidemic Intelligence Service (FL-EIS) Fellowship Program to combat the epidemic.

This partnership has allowed for the PCSO Behavioral Health Intervention Team (BHIT), who also partners with BayCare Behavioral Health, to connect individuals to treatment services. Schools are also able to offer additional prevention education to students. The partnership also implemented the CDC's Rx Awareness Campaign, which will be on billboards and bus wraps throughout the county to increase knowledge and awareness. In addition, DOH-Pasco, PCSO, and the Alliance for Substance Addiction Prevention (ASAP) are working to host a virtual information town hall on opioid misuse and provide education on medication safety measures.

### **BACKGROUND**

Over 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States in the 12 months ending in May 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period, according to recent provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Synthetic opioids (fentanyl) appear to be the primary driver of the increases in overdose deaths, increasing 38.4 percent over the past year. During this time period:

- 37 of the 38 U.S. jurisdictions, including Florida, reported increases in synthetic opioid-involved overdose deaths.
- 18 of these jurisdictions, including Florida reported increases greater than 50 percent.

- Pasco County reported 1,491 individuals who overdosed in 2020.
- 268 of those individuals died.
- Heroin/Fentanyl remain a potent combination.

## **WHAT RESIDENTS CAN DO**

Not all overdoses have to end in death. Everyone has a role to play.

- Learn about the [risks](#) of opioids.
- Learn about [naloxone](#), its availability, and how to use it.
- Help people struggling with opioid use disorder to find the right care and [treatment](#).
- Learn more about CDC's overdose [surveillance](#) and [prevention](#) efforts in your community.

Learn more about what may help if you or someone you care about is [increasing drug use during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

For more information on treatment options, and access to naloxone in your area, visit [isavefl.com](http://isavefl.com).

## **About the Florida Department of Health**

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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