



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

One US City Has More Drug Deaths Than COVID Deaths

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So far this year in San Francisco, 621 people have died of drug **overdoses**. This is a record. It is also far greater than the number of COVID-19 deaths in the California city. As of December 27, that number is 182.

The main cause of the crisis is the powerful painkiller fentanyl. But the number of overdoses would be far higher without the use of an overdose-reversing medication called Narcan. The drug can be sprayed up the nose to quickly bring someone out of an overdose.

The medication was used nearly 3,000 times from January to mid-November to save overdose victims, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and Associated Press reported.

Last year, San Francisco reported 441 overdose deaths, a 70 percent increase from 2018. And 2019 saw 2,610 possible overdoses prevented by Narcan.

The **data** comes from the city's Medical Examiner and the Drug Overdose Prevention and Education Project -- called DOPE for short. DOPE is a city-funded program that works with San Francisco to carry out its overdose prevention efforts.

People who use Narcan are urged to report to DOPE on the number of times they use the drug on overdose victims. The group also records the number of times people return to the program to refill their supply of Narcan.

Because the information is largely self-reported, the actual numbers are thought to be higher.

San Francisco's overdose crisis worsened when fentanyl hit the city's drug supply. Fentanyl can be 50 to 100 times stronger than the pain medication morphine.

The coronavirus pandemic has also worsened the situation. City services, such as housing help and drug treatment, have been **disrupted**.

Nearly 40 percent of the deaths were reported in two downtown neighborhoods. However, the drug crisis has touched every part of the city. Many people overdosed in low-income apartment buildings and in city-funded hotel rooms for the homeless. Others died alone on sidewalks, in **alleyways** and in parks around the city.

I'm Anna Matteo

The Associated Press reported this story. Anna Matteo adapted it for VOA Learning English. Bryan Lynn was the editor.

Words in This Story

overdose – *n.* too large a dose of something; **overdose** – *v.* to take too much of a drug or medicine : to take an overdose of a drug or medicine

data – *n.* facts about something that can be used in calculating, reasoning, or planning

disrupt – *v.* to cause (something) to be unable to continue in the normal way : to interrupt the normal progress or activity of (something)

alleyway – *n.* a passage between buildings
