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# More than 5 Texans die every day from fentanyl. A new online dashboard is tracking these deaths

KERA | By Julián Aguilar | The Texas Newsroom

Published July 15, 2023 at 6:00 PM CDT





*Tommy Farmer / Tennessee Bureau Of Investigation/AP*

These pills were made to look like Oxycodone, but they're actually an illicit form of the potent painkiller fentanyl. A surge in police seizures of illicit fentanyl parallels a rise in overdose deaths.

The state of Texas unveiled an online tool this week that tracks fatalities due to poisoning from fentanyl, the deadly synthetic opioid that's caused thousands of deaths in the state in the last few years.

Gov. Greg Abbott on Thursday announced the [dashboard](#), operated by the Department of State Health Services, as part of his office's "One Pill Kills" awareness [campaign](#) on fentanyl.

The dashboard includes overall statewide data on Fentanyl poisoning deaths and how those figures compare to all drug-related poisoning deaths.

"More than five Texans die every day from deadly fentanyl, and Texas continues to ramp up our efforts to combat the growing fentanyl crisis plaguing our state and the nation," said Abbott said in a statement. "Texans must come together to raise awareness of this deadly opioid to our family, friends, and communities, and the data published on this website will help Texans lead the fight against this deadly drug."

A fentanyl-poisoning death is defined by the state as a death where "fentanyl in indicated in the cause of death description" and it is determined that the fatality was unintentional or accidental, according to the website.

The opioid has effects similar to morphine but is 100 times stronger, [according](#) to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. "Two milligrams of fentanyl can be lethal depending on a person's body size, tolerance and past usage," the DEA noted in a fact sheet.

The Texas data shows that the number of deaths related to fentanyl poisoning in 2022 was more than 2,160. That's about 44% of the state's 4,844 drug-related deaths that year. That's up from 891 and 1,645 fentanyl-related deaths in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Through June 2023, there have been 540 deaths related to fentanyl (The site indicates data from the last three years is preliminary and could change). The information is also broken down by gender, race or ethnicity and age.

The [tool](#) also provides [countywide](#) figures that show the total number of deaths and the rate of death per 100,000 residents. The data can be tracked annually going back to 2014. Unsurprisingly, the state's largest urban counties have been hit hardest by the opioid epidemic. In 2022, there were more than 500 fentanyl-related poisoning fatalities in Harris County. That's followed by 199 in Dallas County, 194 in Travis County, 181 in Bexar and 74 in El Paso.

Though lower in the total number of deaths than Harris County, Travis County had the highest rate of death per 100,000 in 2022 at 14.45, compared to the rate of 9.72 in Harris County. Montgomery County, which had 63 fentanyl-related deaths in 2022, had a rate of 9.66. That was followed by Bexar County's rate of 8.32 and El Paso County's 8.32.

The rollout of the online tool follows a legislative session in Austin where lawmakers passed several measures to combat use of the synthetic drug in Texas, including a House bill that creates [a state charge of murder](#) if supplying the drug results in someone's death. The legislature also passed a measure to make Narcan, also called Naloxone, more available on colleges and universities. The drug quickly reverses the effects of opioids and can be a life-saving measure if administered in time.

The opioid epidemic in Texas has fueled Abbott's ire toward the Biden administration with the governor blaming the White House's so-called "open border" policies for fueling the illicit drug trade. More than two years ago Abbott launched Operation Lone Star, a state-led and taxpayer funded border security operation. Border security operations received more than \$5 billion in the recently passed state budget, which covers the 2024 and 2025 fiscal years, including billions allotted for continue the effort.

Critics of the operation note that the majority of fentanyl comes though ports of entry that connect the United States and Mexico and not between the ports of entry. The Washington Office on Latin America said in a [report](#) released in March that since the start of the federal government's 2023 fiscal year in October, more than 90% of the fentanyl seized has come through ports of entry.

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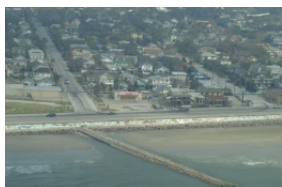
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