

February 18, 2025

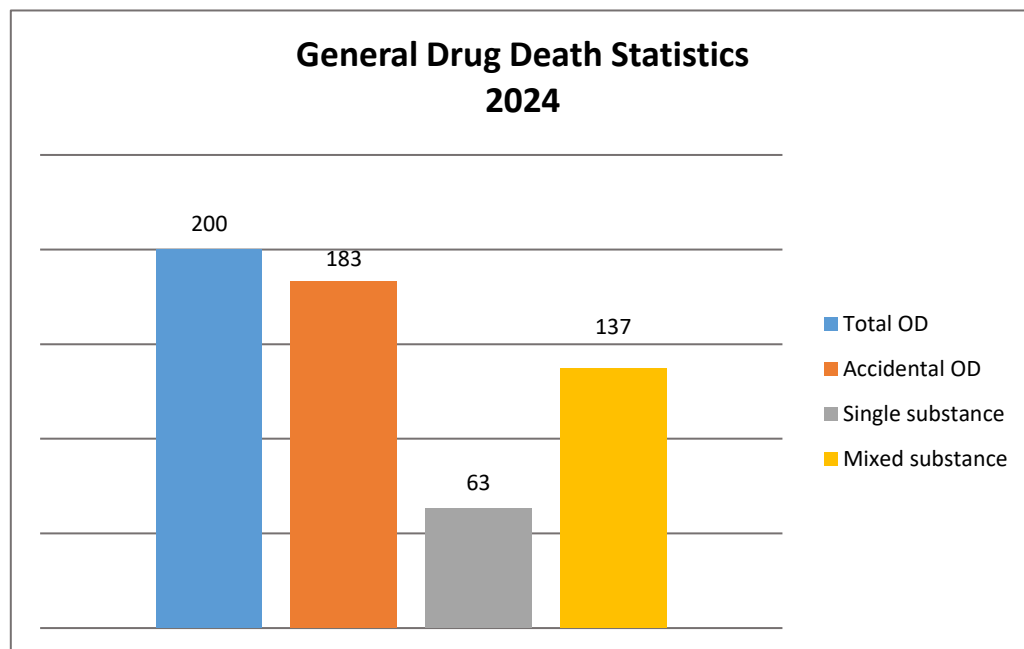
## Special Report: 2024 Fatal Overdoses

1,931 deaths were reported to the Ventura County Medical Examiner's Office during the 2024 calendar year. Jurisdiction was accepted for 903 of these deaths, requiring further investigation and certification. Postmortem examinations were performed on 701 cases. Of the cases investigated, 200 deaths were due to overdose with illicit drugs medications, alcohol or other substances.

Of the 200 overdose deaths, 183 were accidents, 15 were suicides and two deaths were of undetermined manner. Of these overdose deaths, men accounted for 145 deaths (72.5%) and women accounted for 55 deaths (27.5%).

### Noteworthy trends:

- 1) The total number of overdoses in 2024 represents a 24.5% decrease since 2023 and a 30.8% decrease since 2021, when the number of overdoses was the highest in the history of the County.
- 2) The number of fentanyl related overdoses decreased by 36.5% compared to the previous year.
- 3) Methamphetamine related overdoses decreased by 10.6% compared to the previous year.
- 4) The highest number of overdose deaths in 2024 was between ages 31 to 40 years (48 deaths). The highest number of fentanyl overdose deaths was also between ages 31 and 40 (34 deaths).
- 5) The tranquilizer xylazine contributed to three deaths in 2024, which also involved fentanyl.
- 6) The designer drug and illicit benzodiazepine known as bromazolam contributed to five deaths.
- 7) Mitragynine (kratom) contributed to six deaths.

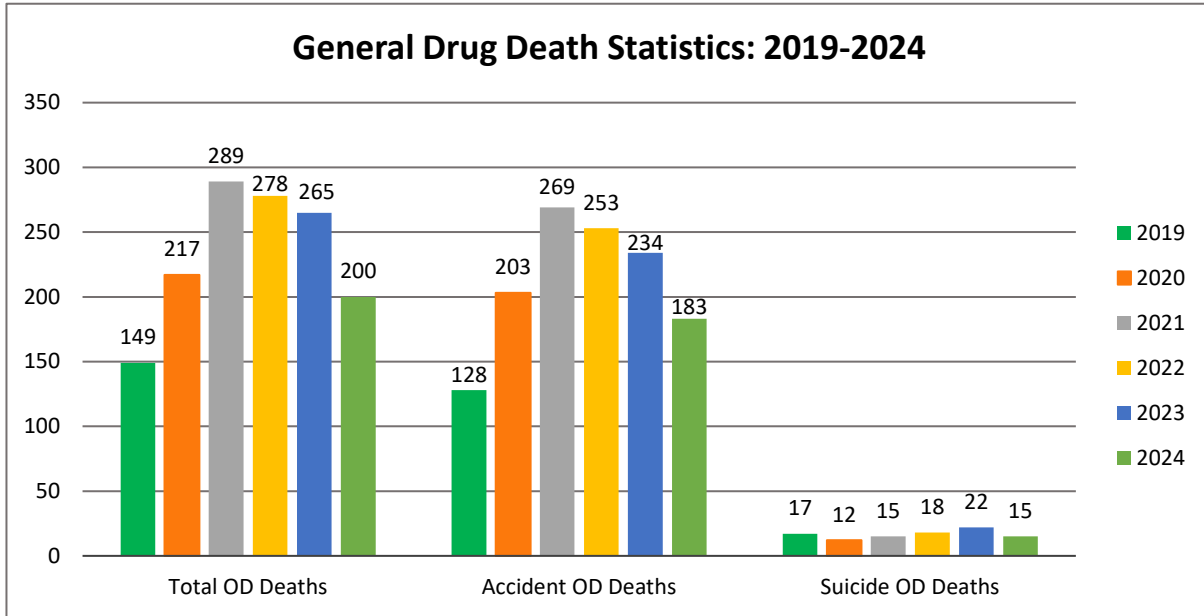




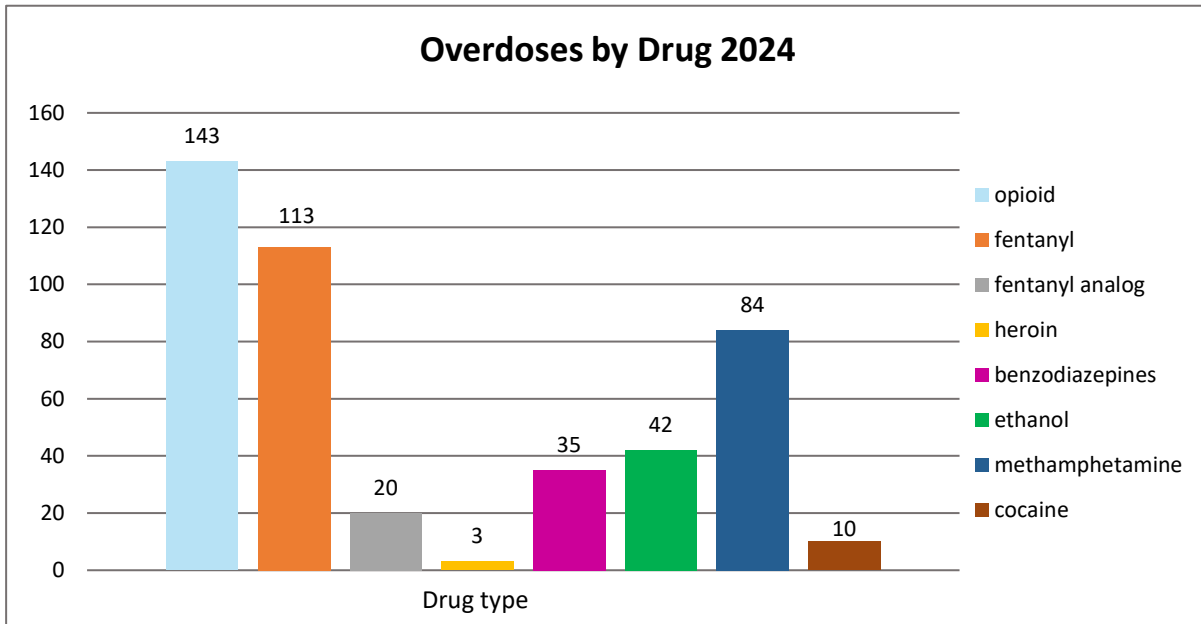
**Christopher R. Young, M.D.**  
 Chief Medical Examiner

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 Associate Forensic Pathologist



*In 2024, the manner of death for two overdose deaths was undetermined*

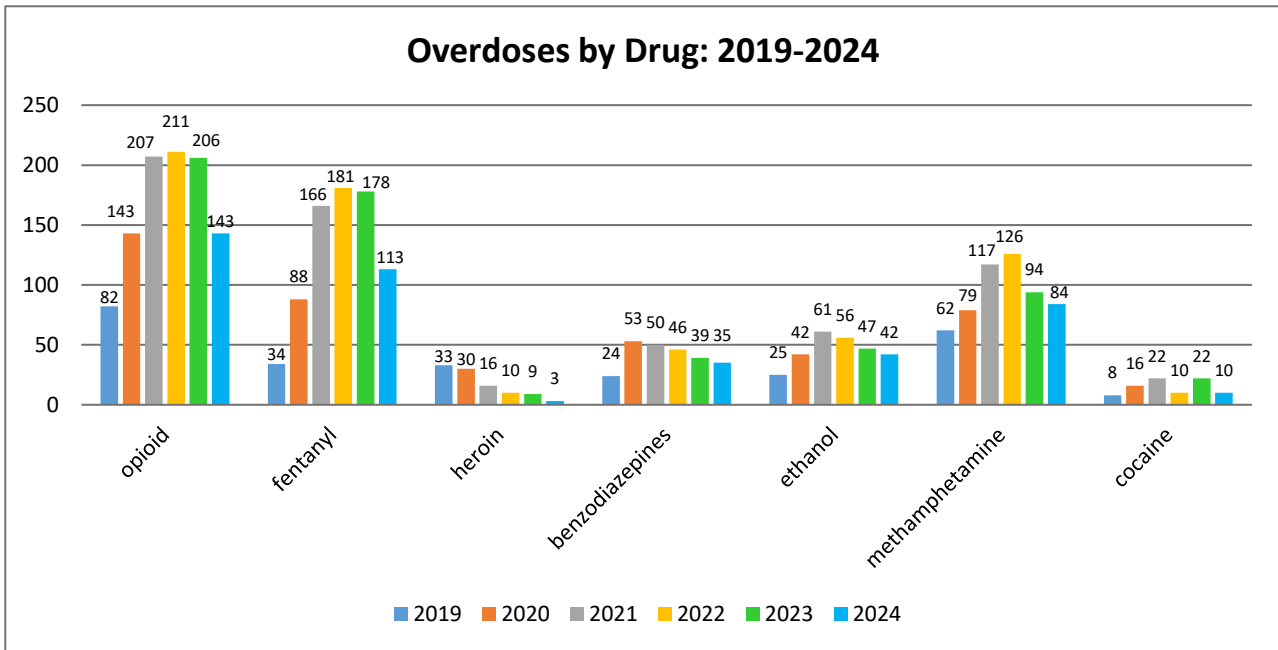


*Drug categories should not be added. Some overdoses involve multiple drugs and some categories are subsets of one another (e.g. fentanyl deaths are included in opioid category and fentanyl analogs are included in the fentanyl total).*

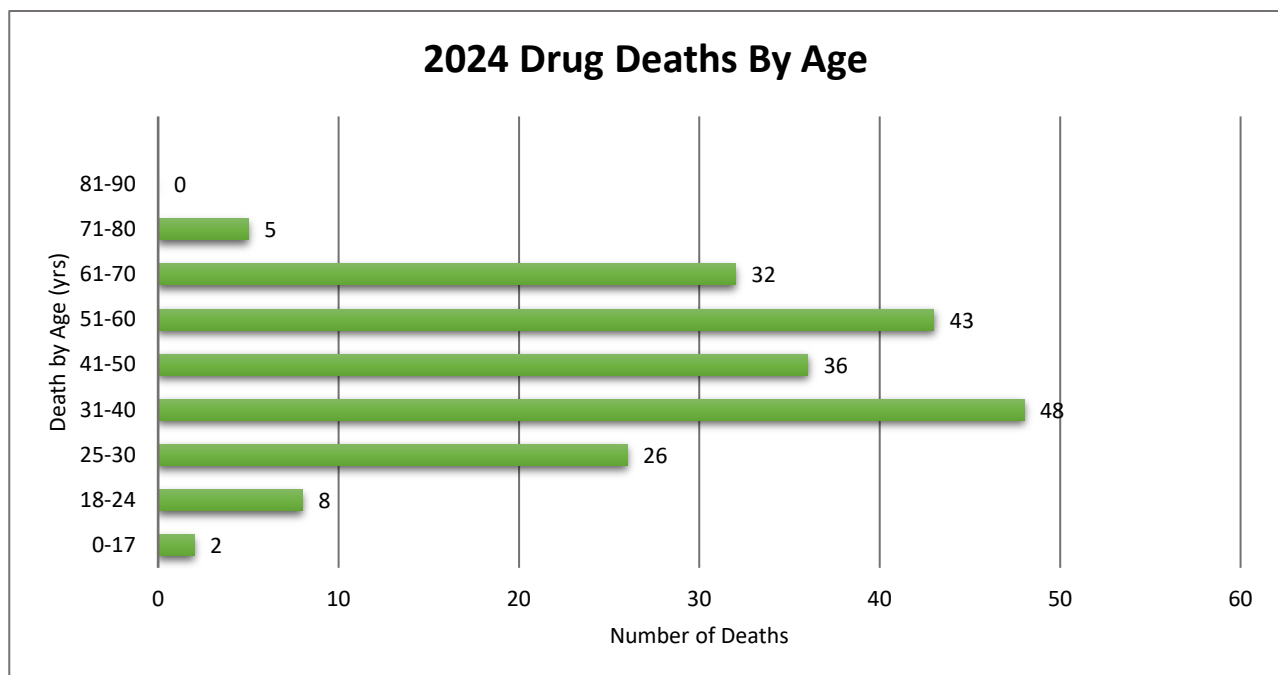
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*Fentanyl is an opioid drug. A death resulting from fentanyl will be included in the totals for both opioid and fentanyl overdoses.*





# COUNTY of VENTURA

## Medical Examiner's Office

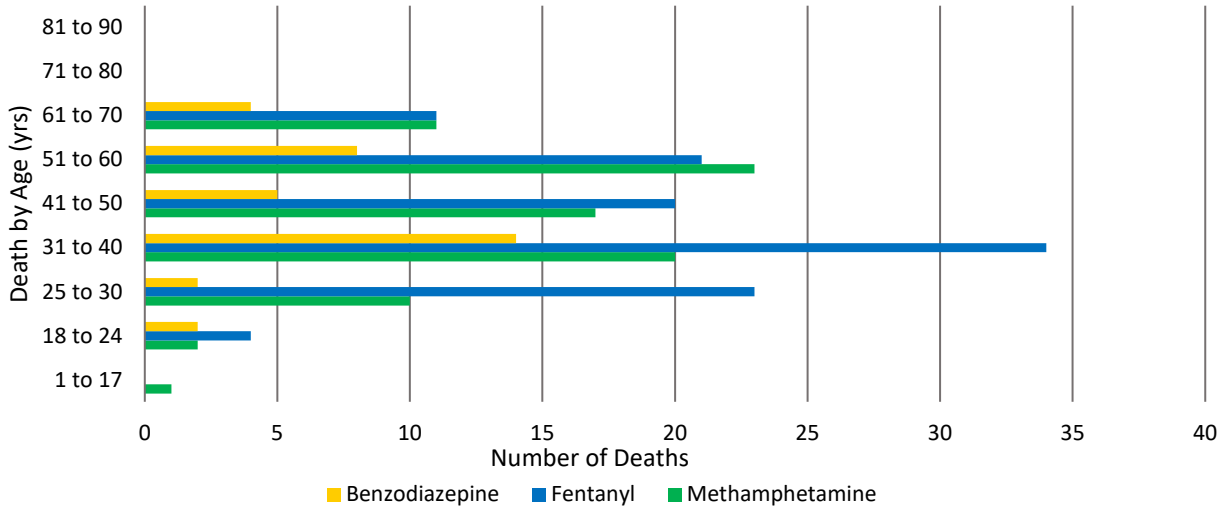
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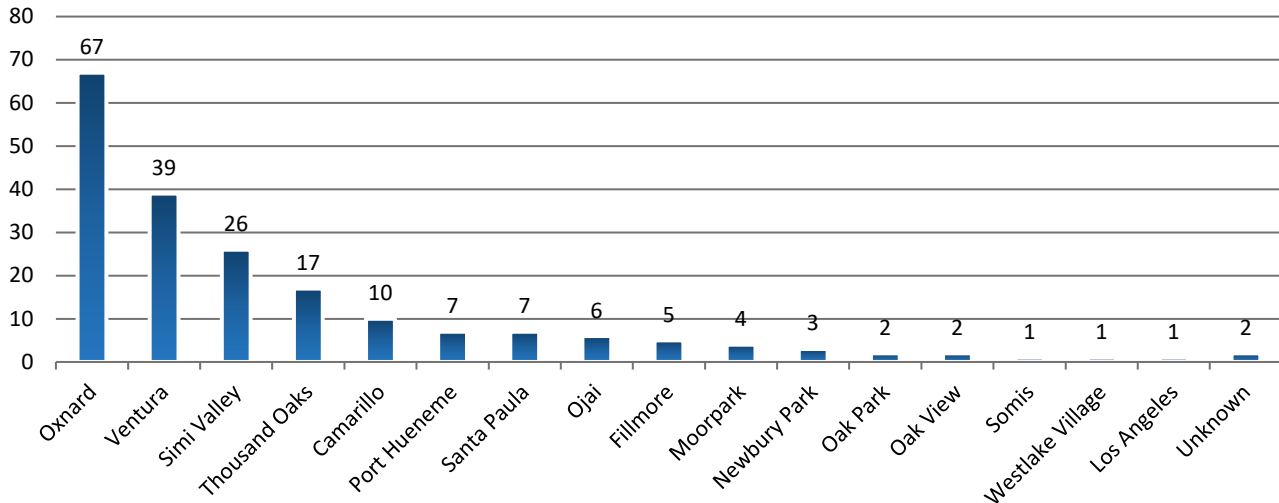
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### 2024 Deaths By Age: Benzodiazepine, Fentanyl, and Methamphetamine



### 2024 Fatal Overdoses By Location of Injury





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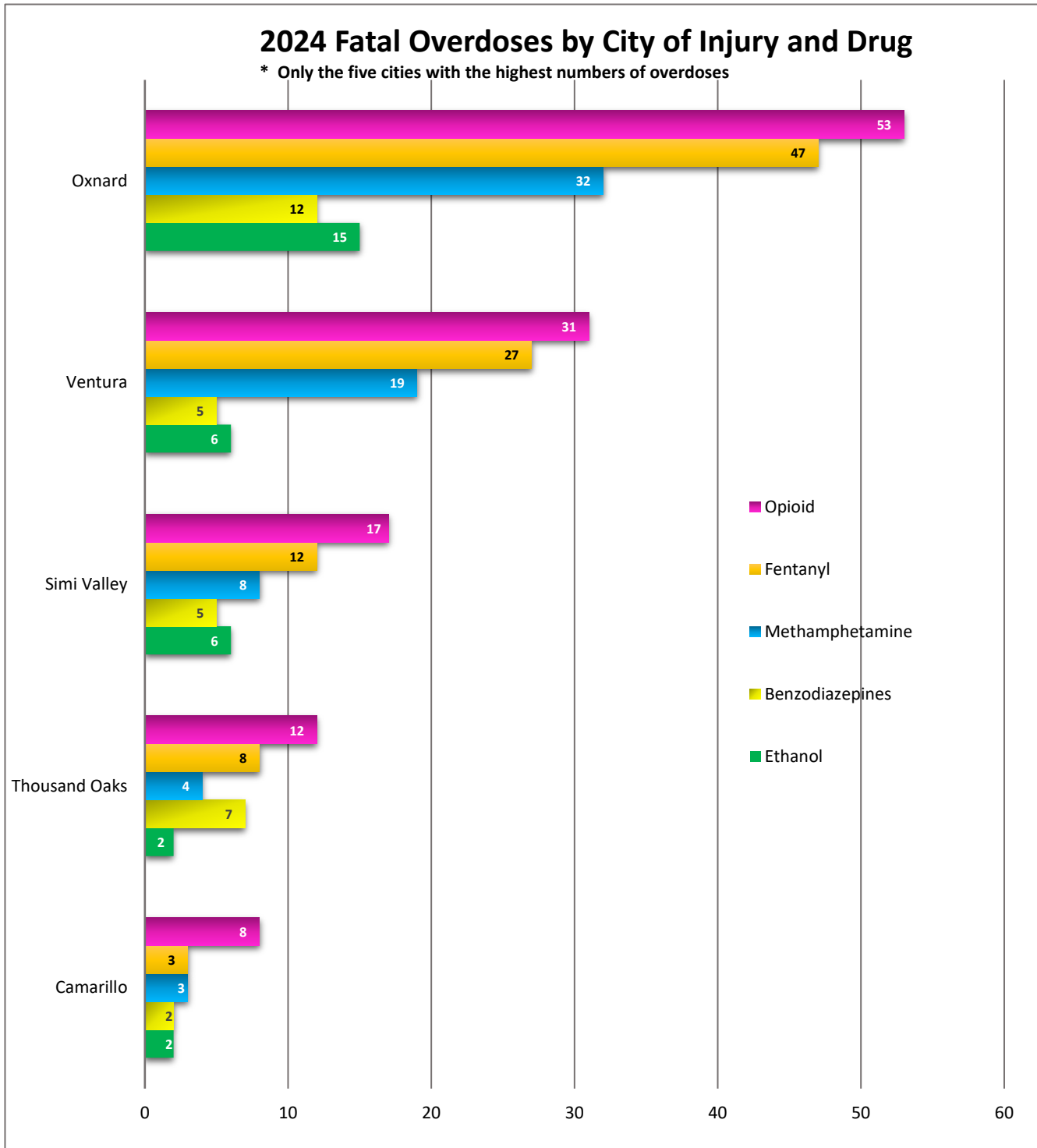
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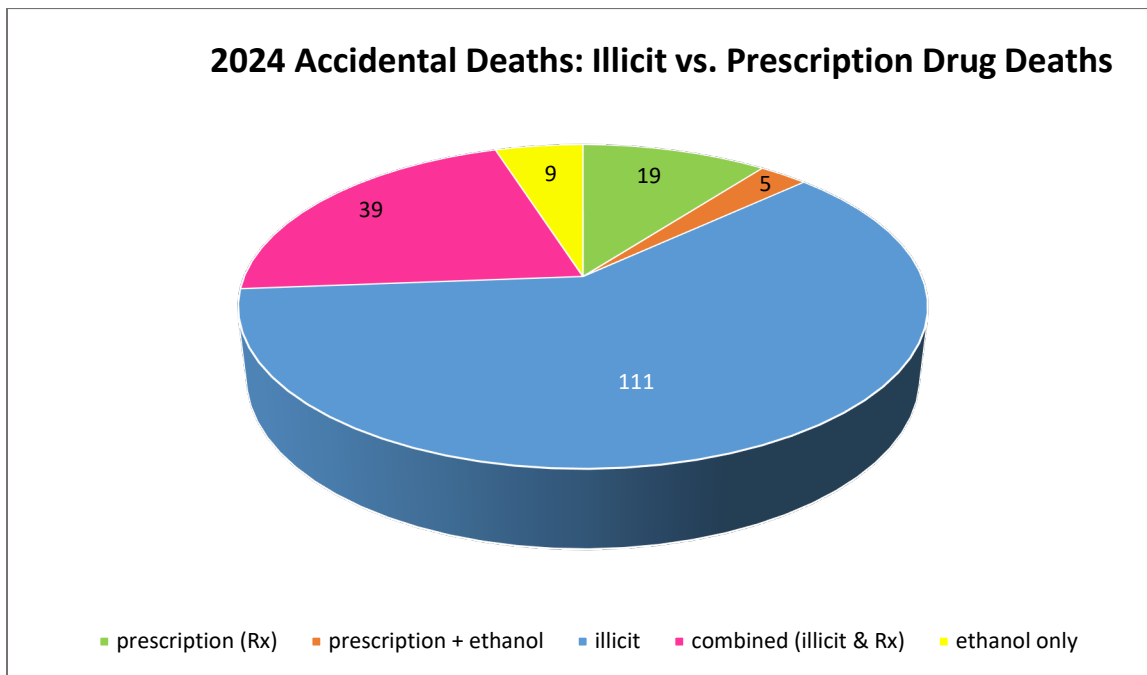
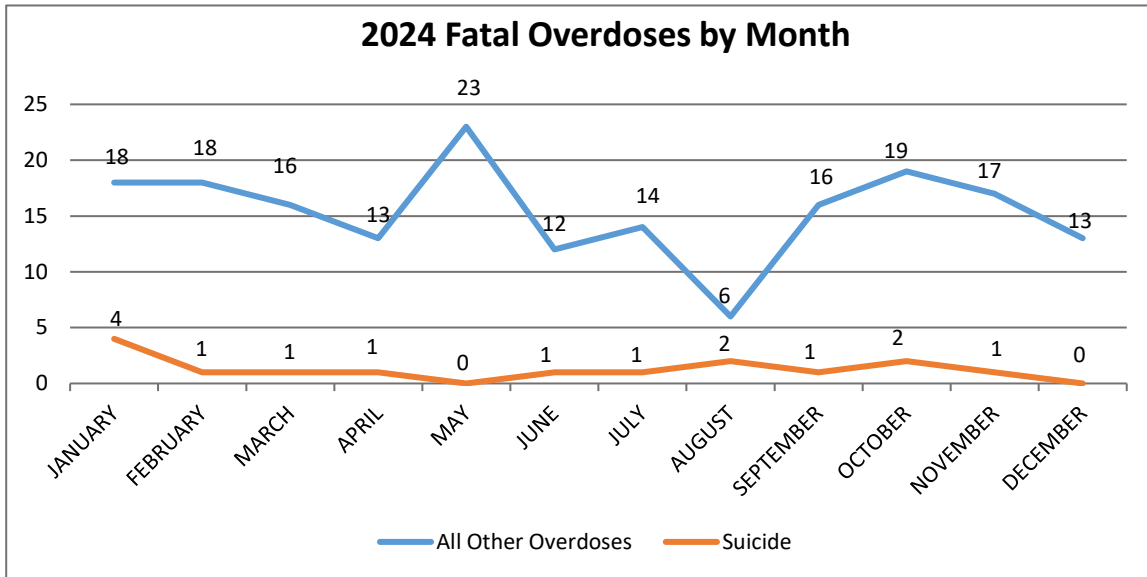
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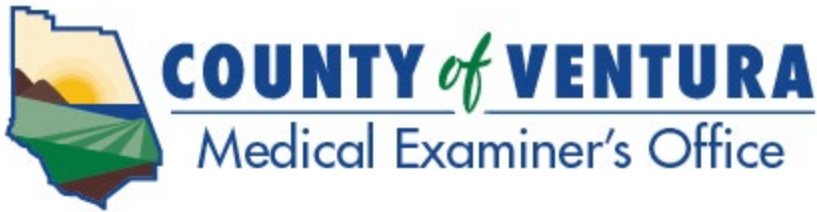
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*Prescription drugs refers to medications commonly obtained through prescription; however, in some deaths, the prescription drugs may have been illicitly obtained.*



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## Data Explanation/Overview:

Multiple drugs or medications may be involved in one case; therefore, one should not add the numbers of individual substances. **The same case may be represented multiple times with different drugs or drug categories. For example, a death due to fentanyl is included in both the fentanyl and opioid totals.** Overdose by city reflects the location of injury (overdose). In some cases, the location of death is different than the location of injury because of transport to a medical facility prior to death.

## APPENDIX:

**Benzodiazepines:** Sometimes called “benzos,” these are sedatives (central nervous system depressants) often used to treat anxiety, insomnia, and other conditions. Combining benzodiazepines with other central nervous system depressants like opioids or alcohol increases a person’s risk of overdose and death.

**Bromazolam:** Bromazolam is a novel benzodiazepine which is not approved for medical use in the United States. Bromazolam has been reported in the illicit drug supply in combination with other drugs like fentanyl.

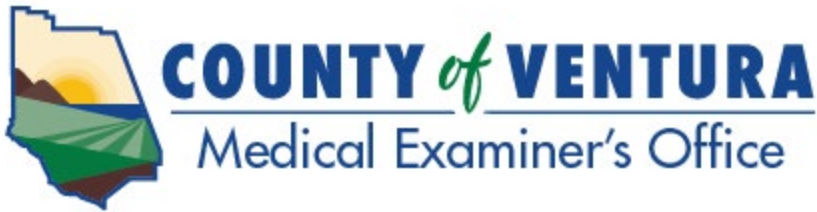
**Cocaine:** Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug obtained from leaves of the coca shrub that stimulates the central nervous system. Cocaine has high potential for abuse but can be administered by a doctor for legitimate medical uses, such as local anesthesia for some eye, ear, and throat surgeries.

**Ethanol:** In this report, ethanol refers to ethyl alcohol (drinking alcohol). Ethanol is a central nervous system depressant and can be especially dangerous when combined with other central nervous system depressants like benzodiazepines or opioids.

**Fentanyl:** Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, approved for treating severe pain, typically advanced cancer pain. Since the 1990s, the drug has been available in a patch or lozenge for easy and effective delivery of time-released medicine. It is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. Illicitly produced fentanyl is sold through illicit drug markets for its heroin-like effect, and it is often mixed with other drugs, such as methamphetamine, or pressed into counterfeit prescription pills.

**Fentanyl Analogs:** Fentanyl analogs are illicit and often deadly alterations of the medically prescribed drug fentanyl. The analogs have a similar chemical structure to fentanyl, and they have similar pharmacological effects as the original drug.

**Heroin:** An illegal, highly addictive opiate drug processed from morphine and extracted from certain poppy plants.



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**Methamphetamine:** A highly addictive central nervous system stimulant drug that is also categorized as a psychostimulant. Methamphetamine use has been linked to mental disorders, problems with physical health, violent behavior, and overdose deaths.

**Mitragynine:** Mitragynine is an opioid compound found in the plant known as kratom. The substance is banned in many states but legally sold in California without labeling or age restrictions.

**Opiates:** Opiates are chemical compounds that are extracted or refined from natural plant matter (poppy sap and fibers). Examples of opiates include opium, morphine, codeine, and heroin.

**Synthetic Opioid Drugs:** Synthetic opioids refer to drugs that bind to opiate receptors which are produced in a lab and not derived from plant matter. The pharmaceutical industry has created more than 500 different opioid molecules. Some are widely used medically, some are not. Examples of well-known opioids used medically in the U.S include hydrocodone, oxycodone, oxymorphone, methadone, fentanyl and loperamide.

**Opioid drugs:** "Opioid drugs" is a broad term which includes both natural, plant derived opiates and synthetic opioid drugs. Opioids work in the brain to produce a variety of effects, including pain relief. As a class of substances, they act on opioid receptors to produce morphine-like effects. Opioid drugs include both illicit and prescribed substances including fentanyl (prescribed or illicit), oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, heroin, methadone etc.

**Xylazine:** Xylazine is a tranquilizer that is not approved for human medical use in the United States. This drug is a central nervous system depressant which is increasingly being found in the illegal drug supply in the US. Like other central nervous system depressants, this drug can be especially life-threatening when combined with opioids like fentanyl.