

**Iowa Department of Public Health**  
**Division of Behavioral Health/Bureau of Substance Abuse**  
**Opioid Update: April 2022**

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) offers the Opioid Update to share information about opioid use and Iowa's efforts to address the national opioid epidemic. Please feel free to submit topics to RaChel Greenwood at [rachel.greenwood@idph.iowa.gov](mailto:rachel.greenwood@idph.iowa.gov).

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## **Opioid News**

### **Statement from SAMHSA Leader on FDA's Drug Safety Alert on Buprenorphine and Risk for Tooth Decay**

Recent FDA guidance highlighted strategies to prevent tooth decay associated with buprenorphine use, as buprenorphine and other opioid agonist medications can reduce saliva production that is important for oral health.

Meriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., Assistant Secretary for Mental health and Substance use urges "patients and providers to weigh the lifesaving benefits of buprenorphine with this identified risk in making decisions about starting and ongoing use of buprenorphine."

To learn more about the FDA guidance, please click on this link: [FDA](#)

To read the SAMHSA statement in full, please click on this link: [SAMHSA](#)

### **Synthetic opioids stronger than fentanyl have cropped up in the US**

In a worrying development of the opioid epidemic, a growing number of states are reporting the emergence of a group of synthetic opioids called nitazenes, which are even more powerful than some forms of fentanyl. Although not expected to surpass fentanyl in their prevalence, experts estimate that nitazenes may have accounted for around 5 percent of the 100,000 fatal overdoses last year.

Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), expressed the importance of surveillance on this emerging issue: "We need to be prepared to screen and recognize when they are emerging to so we can intervene first and understand where they are coming from, where they are being distributed and educate the public about them."

To read the article about this new development, please click on this link: [CHGAM](#)

### **Evaluation of Increases in Drug Overdose Mortality Rates in the US by Race and Ethnicity Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

A recently published analysis of national overdose mortality data indicates that the relative increases in drug overdose mortality rates observed in 2020 were higher than any prior increase

between 1999 and 2019 among all racial and ethnic groups assessed in the study. The authors found that Black individuals had the largest percentage increase in overdose mortality in 2020, overtaking the rate among White individuals for the first time since 1999, and American Indian or Alaskan Native individuals experienced the highest rate of overdose mortality in 2020 of any of the racial groups included in the study.

The authors suggest that the volatile potency of the illicit drug supply may be disproportionately harming racial and ethnic minoritized communities due to inequitable living conditions leading to reduced access to stable housing, preventive care, medications for opioid use disorder and naloxone. The study authors also point to structural racism in the criminal justice system that result in disproportionate numbers of people from minoritized communities being incarcerated and then released into the community with reduced opioid tolerance and less knowledge of shifts in drug potency.

To read this article, please click on this link: [JAMA](#)

## Resources

### **Iowa's Annual Governor's Conference on Substance Abuse (GCSA), April 26-28th 2022**

The Iowa Department of Public Health's Annual Governor's Conference on Substance Abuse will be held virtually from April 26th through April 28th, 2022. The purpose of this conference is to establish a meaningful dialogue among health professionals by focusing on trending topics, best practices and strategies for addressing behavioral health.

Continuing education certificate will be provided and the conference will:

- Provide education to enhance the knowledge of the behavioral health workforce.
- Develop strength within each system discipline and increase collaboration between system partners for coordinated response to substance use and problem gambling.

To visit the conference website, please click on this link: [GCSA](#)

To learn more about conference registration, please click on this link: [RCYT](#)