

OPIOID OVERDOSE DEATHS IN GALVESTON COUNTY



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Executive Summary

Opioid overdose deaths are on the rise across the nation and state of Texas. The increased focus on issues around opioid and specifically fentanyl overdoses revealed difficulties in accounting opioid deaths. Challenges include whether an area has a medical examiner, the non-uniformity of first-responder data collection, and census and residency data discrepancies in population size. Galveston County has a medical examiner and is a smaller population outside a large metropolitan area, which may cause higher reporting compared to other areas. What we do know is Galveston County is being negatively impacted like other Texas counties and counties across the nation by opioids and fentanyl. GCHD and other health authorities are working to understand and better address these issues.

Introduction

With a rise in Fentanyl's both intentional and unintentional use, we've seen a rise in opioid overdose related deaths. The crisis has provoked a great deal of fear in the community.¹ This report lays out the hard data alongside best practices for addressing the fentanyl and opioid crisis.

Starting around 2013, fentanyl opioid overdoses became more common. Galveston County, like counties across the United States, has experienced an overall spike in fentanyl opioid overdoses. Galveston County Health District (GCHD) is responding in real time to this national crisis.

Rise in Opioid Overdose Deaths

Prescription opioids are sometimes used to treat moderate to-severe pain and are often prescribed following surgery or injury or for health conditions such as cancer. By 1999, 86% of patients using opioids were using them for non-cancer pain. Prescriptions for Opioids tripled between 1999 and 2015. Heroin is an illegal, highly addictive opioid. As prescriptions for opioids became harder to obtain, the focus turned to heroin, a cheap, widely available, and potent illegal opioid. Fentanyl is a highly potent synthetic manmade opioid approved for treating severe pain (typically advanced cancer pain). Illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF) is non-pharmaceutical fentanyl made illegally and sometimes mixed into other drugs like cocaine, methamphetamine, or heroin. *Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.* The sharpest rise in drug-related deaths occurred in 2020 with over 56,000 deaths from synthetic opioids, including IMF.

There are challenges to calculating deaths caused by overdose. The State Government, GCHD, and other entities, rely on deaths certifications, medical examiners' reports, and 911 response data, compared to the State and National data reports.

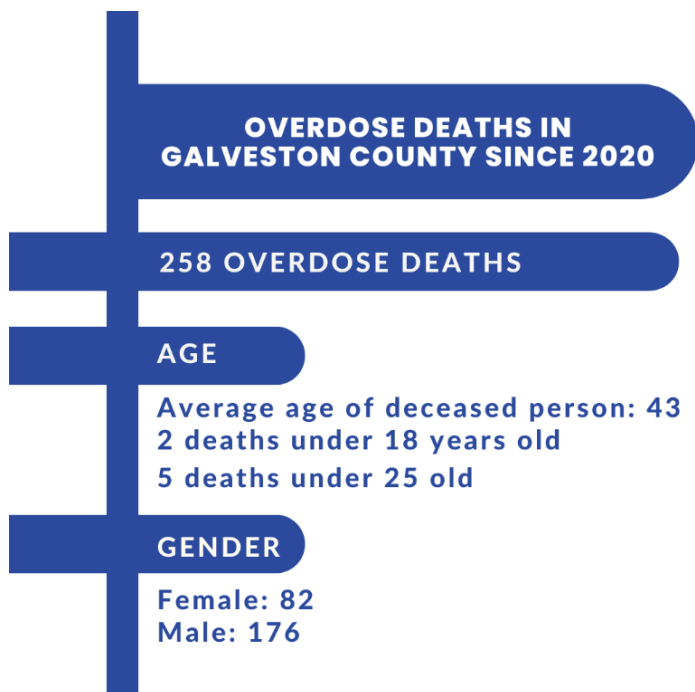
- Not all communities have medical examiners
 - Across Texas, there are just 13 medical examiner offices

- Galveston County does have a Medical Examiner’s office, which might skew the data compared to other counties that do not have an examiner’s office
- First responder and death and mortality data is not uniformly reported across localities
 - Geographic location of overdoses could be recorded by the site of overdose or the place of residence
 - Sometimes census data or regional count differentials can also impact overdose rates
- Smaller populations are more sensitive to larger changes in overall death rates due to their size

There are three proposed bills in the Texas legislature that address data collection around opioid overdose, especially for first responders, that endeavor to improve the availability of good data. These challenges cause difficulties in attaining and analyzing cause of death data.

Opioid Crisis in Texas

In 2020, opioid use in Texas stood at 7.2% while national usage was lower at 5.6%. Galveston County saw 258 overdose deaths since 2020. About double the number of males to females were deceased due to overdose. Most deaths occurred in people over the age of 25.



When compared to other Texas counties, Galveston falls about in the middle of a range of overdose rates. According to Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) data, Orange County saw 17.4 opioid overdoses per 100,000 people in 2020, Harris County saw 9.8 overdoses per 100,000, and Galveston County saw 14.1 overdoses per 100,000.

The table and graph below demonstrate the overdose and opioid overdose rates across different counties. *The numbers are reported by the State (DSHS). GCHD has an internal count that is highlighted and very closely matches the State’s numbers.* The top five counties with the most opioid-related overdose deaths in 2020 were: Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Travis.

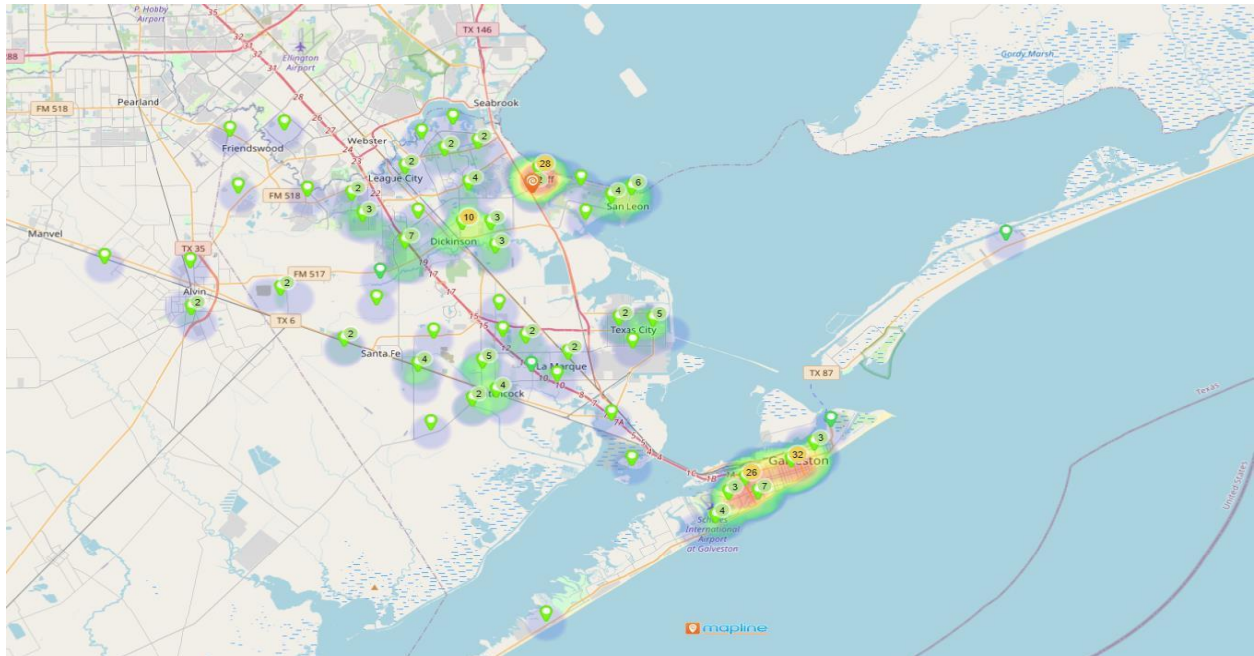
Table 1 Overdose Rates Across Different Texas Counties in 2020

County	Total Overdoses	Total Overdoses per 100,000	Total Opioid Overdoses	Total Opioid Overdoses per 100,000
Harris	826	16.6	489	9.8
Dallas	409	15.0	217	7.9
Galveston	77	21.7	50	14.1
Orange	27	31.3	15	17.4
GCHD Counts	76	22.0	44	12.8

Galveston County’s numbers may be slightly higher than neighboring counties due to spillover from Harris County, access to a medical examiner’s office, and shortcoming in data collection across the state.

Demographic and geographic information is used to refine and better target GCHD’s efforts to address and prevent opioid overdoses. The heat map below shows all opioid overdoses and reflects a greater number occurring on the island, near Bacliff.

Map 1 Heat Map of Fatal and Non-Fatal Opioid Overdoses in Galveston County between 2020-2023



Current GCHD Efforts

GCHD received almost 1,000 boxes of Klaxxado, a brand of Naloxone, which can be used to prevent deaths in opioid overdoses. GCHD approached distribution through phases, first focusing on non-medical first responders, then transitioned to schools, and are now entering community level prevention efforts beginning

with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) programs. The goal of a phased and community-wide approach is to broaden impact across the many spaces where opioids have caused harm and tamp it down.

Image 1 Distribution of 100 boxes to League City PD



Image 2 Distribution to Galveston County Sheriff's Office



GCHD is also working alongside organizations including Bay Area Council On Drugs & Alcohol (BACODA), University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), Recovery Oriented Systems of Care (ROSC) of Galveston County to maximize reach, rather than duplicating efforts.

Image 3 Training for Hitchcock Middle School



GCHD has a Public Health Nurse who is a certified trainer and will train anyone in an organization that requests training regardless of where they have received their supply. These efforts are already beginning to see a positive impact that GCHD will monitor closely over time.

Prevention Best Practices and GCHD Efforts Going Forward

The CDC, Texas Harm Reduction Alliance, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) provided some overlapping recommendations for activities to reduce opioid overdose deaths that GCHD is currently engaged in:

1. Targeted Naloxone distributionⁱⁱ
 - a. 990 boxes of Kloxxado (a brand of Naloxone) were distributed to school districts, police departments, and healthcare workers. All recipients have signed agreements to report back when the emergency medicine is used.
 - b. GCHD has conducted trainings for use of Kloxxado by a certified trainer.

Table 2 Kloxxado Distribution by GCHD in 2023

Date	Beginning Balance Packs (Per pack = 2 doses)	Lot #	Expiration	Manufacturer	Route	Amount Received	Amount Taken	Notes	Remaining Balance
01.30.2023	0	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	990 boxes	0	RECEIVED	990 boxes
02.01.2023	990	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	24	TCISD VIA OFFICER FILLMORE	966
02.01.2023	966	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	24	DISD VIA OFFICER FILLMORE	942
02.10.2023	942	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	1	TO DR. KEISER	941
03.08.2023	941	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	1	TO GRETCHEN GRAY	940
03.08.2023	940	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	1	TO NATALIE FOR INSTRUCTION	939
03.08.2023	939	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	10	LES MCCOLGIN FOR VENDING MACHINE	929
03.09.2023	929	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	25	LaMarque PD	904
03.10.2023	904	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	204	GCSO	700
03.10.2023	700	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	10	TIKI ISLAND FD and PD	690
03.10.23	690	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	10	GALVESTON FD	680
03.16.23	680	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	15	LES MCCOLGIN FOR VENDING MACHINE	665
03.22.23	665	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	3	RN RAPID BAGS	662
03.23.23	662	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	8	Dickinson ISD	654
03.24.23	654	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	18	Port of Galveston PD	636
03.24.23	636	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	8	Texas City High School	628
03.24.23	628	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	7	Texas City ISD	621
03.24.23	621	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	15	Hitchcock PD	606
04.03.23	606	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	1	TO TRISH	605
04.04.23	605	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	18	Santa Fe PD	587
04.05.2023	587	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	15	DR. CLANCY FOR VENDING MACHINE	572
04.06.23	572	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	66	Friendswood PD	506
04.06.23	506	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	12	CERT	494
04.08.23	494	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	10	Crystal Beach, Bolivar, High Island	484
04.10.23	484	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	13	PHNs	471
04.12.23	471	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	33	Bayou Vista PD	438
04.13.23	438	AB6226A	10/31/2023	KLOXXADO	IntraNasal	0	100	ON HOLD FOR LCPD	338

2. Data collection and academic study
3. Community outreachⁱⁱⁱ
4. Support expansion of access to Substance Use Disorder – Mental Health (SUD-MH) programs^{iv}
5. Expand the Provision and use of Naloxone and Overdose Prevention Education

GCHD is currently working to expand access to Naloxone across Galveston County, first focusing on enabling first responders with a supply and education on how to use it, with a goal of making the emergency tool more widely available, especially in areas where opioid overdose risk is higher. GCHD is also engaged in educating the public and community leaders about fentanyl and opioid overdose risks. GCHD's close partner, Coastal Health and Wellness (CHW), has a Substance Use Disorder – Mental Health (SUD-MH) Program that is intended to help those who struggle with opioid addiction and other substance use disorders. CHW has also partnered with Gulf Coast Center to expand access to mental health services.

Some of these strategies are limited due to resources or law. For example, there is current legislation legalizing the use of fentanyl testing strips that was approved almost unanimously by the Texas House of Representatives.^v As new strategies and resources become available, GCHD will refine these efforts to enhance their impact and effectiveness.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. "Understanding the Opioid Overdose Epidemic." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. June 1, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/epidemic.html>.

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. 2023. "Evidence-Based Strategies for Preventing Opioid Overdose: What's Working in the United States." June 9, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/featured-topics/evidence-based-strategies.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Texas Harm Reduction Alliance. 2023. "Texas Harm Reduction Alliance." THRA. 2023. <https://www.harmreductiontx.org/services>.

^{iv} Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA). 2018. "SAMHSA Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit." Samhsa.Gov. 2018. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma18-4742.pdf>.

^v Barragán, James. 2023. "Texas House Passes Bill Decriminalizing Fentanyl Test Strips." The Texas Tribune. April 10, 2023. <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/04/10/texas-house-fentanyl-testing-strips/>.