

Colorado Drug Death Rate Tops U.S. Average

Some Counties Among Nation's Highest

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New data paint a grim picture of Colorado's rising drug-related deaths.

The statewide rate of drug overdose deaths climbed 68 percent between 2002 and 2014, from 9.7 per 100,000 residents to 16.3 per 100,000 residents. Colorado's 2014 rate is higher than the national average of 14.7 drug-related deaths per 100,000.

And over those 13 years, the drug overdose death rate has increased in each Colorado county except for one — Mineral County in the southwestern part of the state. In some cases, the increase has been dramatic.

The Colorado Health Institute (CHI) has analyzed new county-level estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for this report. In addition, CHI has created a time-lapse map that tracks changes in the drug-related death rates. (Go to <http://bit.ly/1StBvc0>.)

Counties and Drug-Related Deaths

In 2014, 899 Coloradans died from either an intentional or unintentional drug overdose. But some counties are encountering more deaths than others.

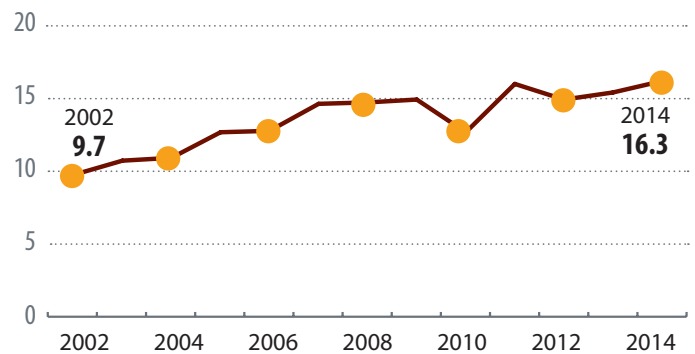
Twelve Colorado counties have drug overdose death rates of more than 20 per 100,000 residents, meaning they are among the highest in the nation.

Seven of those counties — Baca, Bent, Conejos, Rio Grande, Las Animas, Costilla and Huerfano — are in rural southern Colorado. Three — Adams, Denver and Pueblo — are urban counties along the Front Range. The final two are Delta on the Western Slope and Jackson in the north.

Many of these counties have struggled with high drug death rates over those years.

The CDC adjusted the death rates for age. It also placed them in ranges per 100,000 residents. For this analysis, CHI

Graph 1. Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Death Rate per 100,000, Colorado, 2002-2014



used 11 categories from lowest to highest. For example, Category 1 covers a range of zero deaths to two deaths per 100,000 residents. Category 11 includes counties with death rates of more than 20 per 100,000 residents. (See Maps 1 and 2.)

Baca County's drug death rate grew the fastest. In 2002, the county in far southeastern Colorado next to the Kansas border had a drug death rate of between 4.1 and 6.0 per 100,000, the third lowest category. By 2014, the death rate had grown to more than 20 deaths per 100,000, the highest category.

Indeed, 12 Colorado counties saw their death rates jump by six or more categories over the 13-year span. In total, 21 increased by five or more categories.

Huerfano County has recorded drug death rates in the highest category since 2003. In 2002, the first year of

HUERFANO COUNTY

Has ranked in the worst category for overdose deaths since 2003.

available data, it was in the second-highest category.

In sparsely populated Mineral County, home to the town of Creede, the rate has remained in the lowest category since 2002.

Methodology

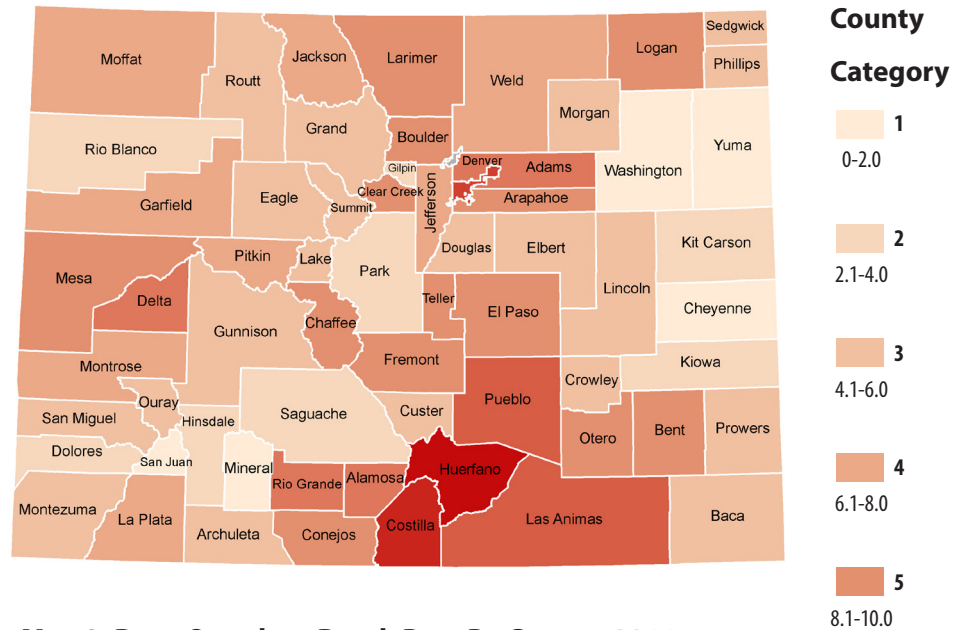
Data are from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centers for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, mortality data (see <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/deaths.htm>).

Deaths are classified using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10). Drug-poisoning deaths are defined as having ICD-10 underlying cause-of-death codes X40-X44 (unintentional), X60-X64 (suicide), X85 (homicide), or Y10-Y14 (undetermined intent).

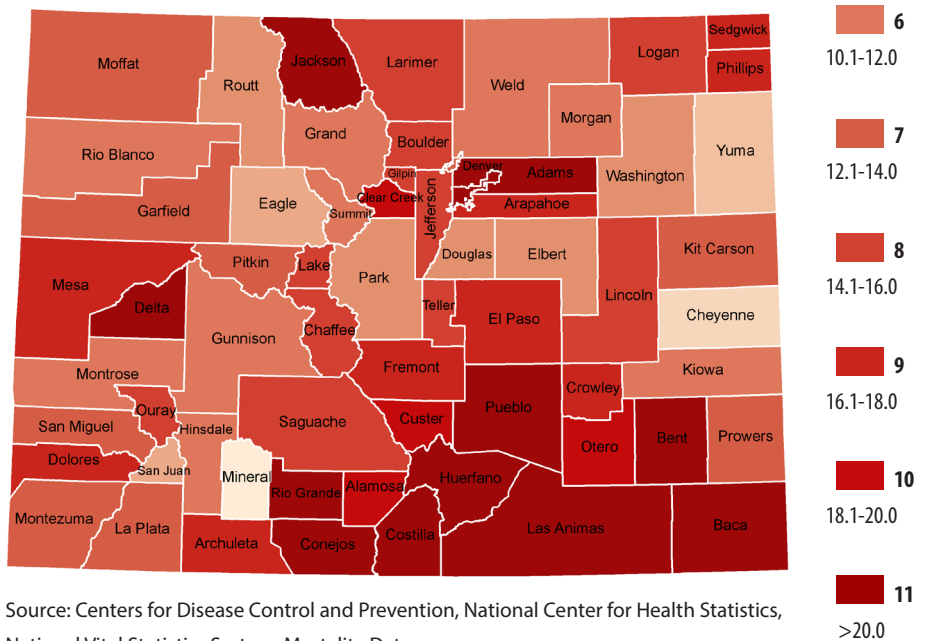
Age-adjusted death rates (deaths per 100,000 Colorado population) are calculated in this analysis. Because different diseases or causes of death may be more likely to occur in a certain age bracket, it is helpful to age-adjust in order to prevent data from being biased simply because a population skews older or younger.

Policy Analyst Tamara Keeney and Public Interest Fellow Maggie Bailey are the authors of this report. Senior Data Analyst Rebecca Silvernale provided data support.

Map 1. Drug Overdose Death Rate By County, 2002



Map 2. Drug Overdose Death Rate By County, 2014



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality Data



The Colorado Health Institute is a trusted source of independent and objective health information, data and analysis for the state's health care leaders. The Colorado Health Institute is funded by the Caring for Colorado Foundation, Rose Community Foundation, The Colorado Trust and the Colorado Health Foundation.

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