

2020 Overdose Fatality Report

Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy



Commonwealth of Kentucky

Justice & Public Safety Cabinet

Mary C. Noble, Secretary
Justice & Public Safety Cabinet

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

Kentucky County Resident Age Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate..... 5

Kentucky County Resident Drug Overdose Deaths by Age 11

Kentucky County Resident Drug Overdose Deaths by Race 12

Frequency of Substances Found in Resident Drug Overdose Decedent Toxicology Testing, 2020 13

Drug Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020 (Map) 17

Heroin Involved Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020 (Map) 18

Fentanyl Involved Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020 (Map) 18

Methamphetamine Involved Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020 (Map) 20

Introduction

Substance misuse, particularly the diversion and abuse of prescription drugs and substances such as illicit fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine, remains one of the most critical public health and safety issues facing Kentucky. For years, the annual number of Kentuckians who died from drug overdoses steadily climbed, exacting a disastrous toll on families, communities, social services and economic growth.

More than 1,964 Kentuckians died from drug overdoses in 2020. That's a 49% increase from the 1,316 overdose deaths for 2019.

Nationally, more than 93,000 people died from drug overdoses in 2020, which represents the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period.

The Office of Drug Control Policy believes the global pandemic caused by Covid-19 was a major contributing factor in the rise in overdose deaths across the United States and in Kentucky. The interruption of routine for those in recovery, the sense of isolation, economic concerns and anxiety all contributed to the dramatic increase recorded.

The increase was also due to a significant rise in illicit fentanyl and its analogs within the drug supply. An opioid was involved in 90% of all deaths, and fentanyl was detected in more than 70% of all cases in Kentucky and nationwide. The overdose increase was also exacerbated by the widespread availability of potent inexpensive methamphetamine.

In 2017, the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, in partnership with Operation UNITE, established a substance abuse call center to connect people across the state with drug treatment services. The KY-HELP Call Center provides referrals to both public and private treatment providers in real-time.

Kentuckians struggling with a substance use disorder, either themselves or within their families, can call 1-833-8KY-HELP (1-833-859-4357) toll-free to speak with a live specialist about treatment options and available resources. The specialist will conduct a brief screening assessment in order to connect callers with the most relevant treatment services as quickly as possible. Options include everything from medication-assisted treatment to faith-based care, and the specialist will help callers work through all the variables, such as location and cost.

The Office of Drug Control Policy and the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center (KIPRC) also collaborated with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet to create www.findhelpnowky.org. The website provides a vital link for Kentucky health care providers, court officials, families and individuals seeking options for substance abuse treatment and recovery. It offers real-time information about available space in treatment programs and guides users to the right type of treatment based upon their needs. The site is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

* * *

House Bill 1 mandates that the Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy, in cooperation with the Kentucky Office of the Medical Examiner, prepare and publish an annual public report for the Secretary of the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet and include:

- (1) The number of drug-related deaths;
- (2) The decedent's age, race and gender, but not his or her name or address;
- (3) The counties in which those deaths occurred;
- (4) The scientific, trade or generic names of the drugs involved; and
- (5) The method by which the drugs were obtained, when available.

This report was compiled utilizing data from the Kentucky Office of the Medical Examiner, KIPRC and the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics (OVS).

KIPRC, with support from the CDC, launched the **Drug Overdose Technical Assistance Core (DOTAC)** to support local health departments, community coalitions, and state and local agencies in their efforts to address substance misuse, abuse and overdose. DOTAC's goal is to support and enhance local agencies' and community organizations' access to timely local data and analytical results on controlled substance prescribing, drug-related morbidity and mortality trends.

More information on the available data, analytical and community services is available at <http://www.mc.uky.edu/kiprc/dotac/index.html>

Note: The Kentucky Office of Drug Control Policy has changed its reporting methodology this year to focus on Kentucky residents who died from overdoses. This will make comparisons with CDC data more useful.

Key Findings from 2020 include¹:

Overdose deaths of Kentucky residents, regardless of where the death occurred, totaled 1,964 (at the time of this report), compared to 1,316 in 2019, representing an approximate 49% increase. A review of the resident cases autopsied by the Kentucky Office of the Medical Examiner and toxicology reports submitted by Kentucky Coroners indicates that in 2020:

- Residents in the age group of 35-44 were the largest demographic in overdose deaths, followed closely by the age group of 25-34 and then age group 45-54..
- Autopsies performed by the Kentucky Office of the Medical Examiner and toxicology reports submitted by Kentucky coroners show that approximately 191 resident overdose deaths involved the use of heroin in 2020, an increase from 166 in 2019.
- Fentanyl was involved in 1,393 cases, approximately 71% of all overdose deaths for the year. Acetylfentanyl was involved in 502 cases.
- Jefferson County had the most resident overdose deaths of any county with 512 reported, an increase from 319 in 2019.
- The largest increase in resident overdose fatalities occurred in Jefferson County, where deaths increased by 193. Other counties with increases include Fayette by 51, Clark by 20, Campbell by 18 and Boone by 16.
- Morphine was detected in 504 resident cases, an increase from 397 in 2019, and heroin was detected in 191 cases, an increase from 166 in 2019.
- Alprazolam was detected in approximately 237 cases, an increase from 165 in 2019.
- Gabapentin was detected in 390 cases, an increase from 292 cases in 2019.
- Methamphetamine was detected in 801 cases, an increase from 517 in 2019.
- Oxycodone was detected in 198 cases, an increase from 170 cases in 2019

¹This report was compiled by the most current data supplied by KIPRC and will change as additional toxicology reports are submitted. The stated statistics are presented from toxicology of overdose deaths of Kentucky resident

Data compiled by the Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics

Most resident, overdose deaths by county: (age adjusted, per capita)

1) Knott	121.69
2) Clark	104.3
3) Bourbon	98.43
4) Henry	87.97
5) Carter	82.34

Most resident, fentanyl-related deaths by county:

1) Jefferson	417
2) Fayette	128
3) Madison	50
4) Boone	38
5) Carter	14

Most resident, methamphetamine- related overdose deaths by county:

1) Jefferson	166
2) Fayette	28
3) Kenton	15
4) Pulaski	12
5) Bullitt	12

Kentucky County Resident Age Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate

Kentucky County Resident Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate		
County	Overdoses	Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate
Kentucky	1,964	46.18
Adair	<5	Suppressed
Allen	6	Suppressed
Anderson	14	59.49
Ballard	<5	Suppressed
Barren	2	Suppressed
Bath	8	Suppressed
Bell	9	Suppressed
Boone	50	38.76
Bourbon	18	98.43
Boyd	35	67.12
Boyle	12	43.96
Bracken	<5	Suppressed
Breathitt	6	Suppressed
Breckinridge	7	Suppressed
Bullitt	42	53.12
Butler	<5	Suppressed
Caldwell	<5	Suppressed
Calloway	9	Suppressed
Campbell	54	54.73
Carlisle	<5	Suppressed

¹Numbers <5 were suppressed in accordance with state data release policy.

²Rates based on counts <10 were suppressed according to state data release policy. ³Rates based on counts <20 are unstable and should be interpreted with caution. ⁴Data are provisional and subject to change.

Produced by the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center, as bona fide agent for the Kentucky Department for Public Health. May 2021. Data source: Kentucky Death Certificate Database, Kentucky Office of Vital Statistics, Cabinet for Health and Family Services. [This report was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number NU17CE924971-02-01, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.](#) Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.

Kentucky County Resident Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate		
County	Overdoses	Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate
Kentucky	1,964	46.18
Carroll	6	Suppressed
Carter	21	82.34
Casey	<5	Suppressed
Christian	18	34.63
Clark	35	104.3
Clay	<5	Suppressed
Clinton	7	Suppressed
Crittenden	<5	Suppressed
Cumberland	0	0.0
Daviess	21	23.22
Edmonson	0	0.0
Elliott	<5	Suppressed
Estill	11	79.21
Fayette	150	46.91
Fleming	<5	Suppressed
Floyd	16	50.2
Franklin	20	44.12
Fulton	0	0.0
Gallatin	<5	Suppressed
Garrard	15	85

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Kentucky County Resident Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate		
County	Overdoses	Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate
Kentucky	1,964	46.18
Grant	17	76.41
Graves	5	Suppressed
Grayson	8	Suppressed
Green	0	0.0
Greenup	22	64.64
Hancock	<5	Suppressed
Hardin	31	30.01
Harlan	14	60.76
Harrison	8	Suppressed
Hart	<5	Suppressed
Henderson	8	Suppressed
Henry	12	87.97
Hickman	0	0.0
Hopkins	6	Suppressed
Jackson	<5	Suppressed
Jefferson	512	69.11
Jessamine	34	63.99
Johnson	6	Suppressed
Kenton	85	52.69
Knott	19	121.69

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Kentucky County Resident Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate		
County	Overdoses	Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate
Kentucky	1,964	46.18
Knox	11	37.3
Larue	<5	Suppressed
Laurel	22	37.87
Lawrence	<5	Suppressed
Lee	5	Suppressed
Leslie	<5	Suppressed
Letcher	5	Suppressed
Lewis	<5	Suppressed
Lincoln	15	66.91
Livingston	<5	Suppressed
Logan	<5	Suppressed
Lyon	<5	Suppressed
Madison	68	81.16
Magoffin	8	Suppressed
Marion	11	56.87
Marshall	<5	Suppressed
Martin	6	Suppressed
Mason	<5	Suppressed
McCracken	12	21.01
McCreary	<5	Suppressed

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Kentucky County Resident Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate		
County	Overdoses	Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate
Kentucky	1,964	46.18
McLean	0	0.0
Meade	10	33.07
Menifee	<5	Suppressed
Mercer	7	Suppressed
Metcalfe	<5	Suppressed
Monroe	<5	Suppressed
Montgomery	14	51.9
Morgan	6	Suppressed
Muhlenberg	8	Suppressed
Nelson	20	45.25
Nicholas	7	Suppressed
Ohio	<5	Suppressed
Oldham	8	Suppressed
Owen	6	Suppressed
Owsley	<5	Suppressed
Pendleton	5	Suppressed
Perry	17	68.58
Pike	25	47.83
Powell	9	Suppressed
Pulaski	24	40.1

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Kentucky County Resident Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate		
County	Overdoses	Age-Adjusted Drug Overdose Mortality Rate
Kentucky	1,964	46.18
Robertson	<5	Suppressed
Rockcastle	8	Suppressed
Rowan	10	49.36
Russell	<5	Suppressed
Scott	29	50.71
Shelby	14	27.69
Simpson	<5	Suppressed
Spencer	7	Suppressed
Taylor	14	59.16
Todd	5	Suppressed
Trigg	<5	Suppressed
Trimble	<5	Suppressed
Union	<5	Suppressed
Warren	25	19.62
Washington	<5	Suppressed
Wayne	8	Suppressed
Webster	<5	Suppressed
Whitley	12	42.17
Wolfe	8	Suppressed
Woodford	11	42.6

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Kentucky County Resident Drug Overdose Deaths by Age

Count of Kentucky Drug Overdose Deaths by Age Group			
Age	2018	2019	2020
0-4	0	0	<5
5-14	0	<5	<5
15-24	79	67	127
25-34	314	298	463
35-44	335	366	570
45-54	288	325	405
55-64	194	198	304
65-74	31	45	75
75-84	7	14	14
85+	<5	<5	<5

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Kentucky County Resident Drug Overdose Deaths by Race

Count of Kentucky Drug Overdose Deaths by Race			
Race	2018	2019	2020
White	1,151	1,191	1,772
Black	77	105	172
Other	22	20	20

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Frequency of Substances Found in Resident Drug Overdose Decedent Toxicology Testing, 2020

Substance	Frequency
Fentanyl	1,393
4-ANPP	1,000
Methamphetamine	801
Amphetamine	629
Morphine	504
<u>Acetylfentanyl</u>	502
Gabapentin	390
THC-COOH	354
Ethanol	271
Cocaine	252
THC	246
Alprazolam	237
Oxycodone	198
Heroin	191
Clonazepam	169
Hydrocodone	165
<u>Oxymorphone</u>	131
Codeine	130
Hydromorphone	130
Buprenorphine	119
Tramadol	117
<u>Oxazepam</u>	97
<u>Dihydrocodeine</u>	91
<u>Nordiazepam</u>	84
<u>Temazepam</u>	76
Methadone	61
Diazepam	44
<u>Butyrylfentanyl</u>	30
Caffeine	30
Lorazepam	27
Cotinine	23
Drug Class Only	21
Naloxone	15
Pseudoephedrine	15
Acetone	11

Substance	Frequency
<u>Chlordiazepoxide</u>	10
Acetaminophen	9
Diphenhydramine	9
MDMA	9
Other	9
<u>Carfentanil</u>	8
Hydroxyzine	8
<u>Bupropion</u>	6
Cyclobenzaprine	6
Fluoxetine	6
Methanol	6
Phenylpropanolamine	6
Quetiapine	6
Ibuprofen	5
Phentermine	5
<u>Butalbital</u>	<5
MDA	<5
<u>Meprobamate</u>	<5
Midazolam	<5
Naproxen	<5
Trazodone	<5
1-Difluoroethane	<5
5-Fluoro-MDMB-PICA	<5
Ephedrine	<5
Isopropanol	<5
Metoprolol	<5
Nicotine	<5
Promethazine	<5
Salicylates	<5
5F-ADB	<5
Citalopram	<5
Dextromethorphan	<5
Duloxetine	<5
<u>Flurazepam</u>	<5
<u>Levetiracetam</u>	<5
Mirtazapine	<5
<u>Mitragynine</u>	<5

Substance	Frequency
Nortriptyline	<5
Oxcarbazepine	<5
<u>Propranolol</u>	<5
Risperidone	<5
U47700	<5
Zolpidem	<5
Acetaldehyde	<5
Amitriptyline	<5
Aripiprazole	<5
<u>Buspirone</u>	<5
Carbamazepine	<5
<u>Chlorophenylpiperazine</u>	<5
CIS-3-Methylfentanyl	<5
Diltiazem	<5
<u>Flecainide</u>	<5
<u>Flualprazolam</u>	<5
Fluvoxamine	<5
<u>Furanylfentanyl</u>	<5
Meperidine	<5
<u>Metaxalone</u>	<5
Metoclopramide	<5
<u>Nabumetone</u>	<5
<u>Perchloroethylene</u>	<5
Phenobarbital	<5
<u>Pregabalin</u>	<5
Sertraline	<5
<u>Topiramate</u>	<5
<u>Triazolam</u>	<5
Venlafaxine	<5
Ziprasidone	<5

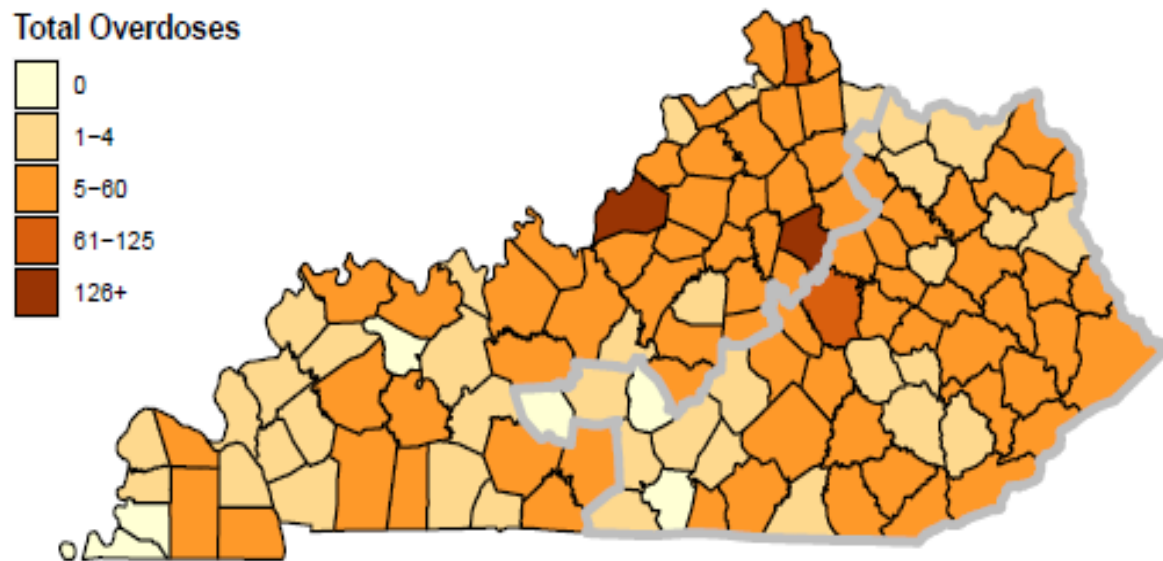
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Count of Drug Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020

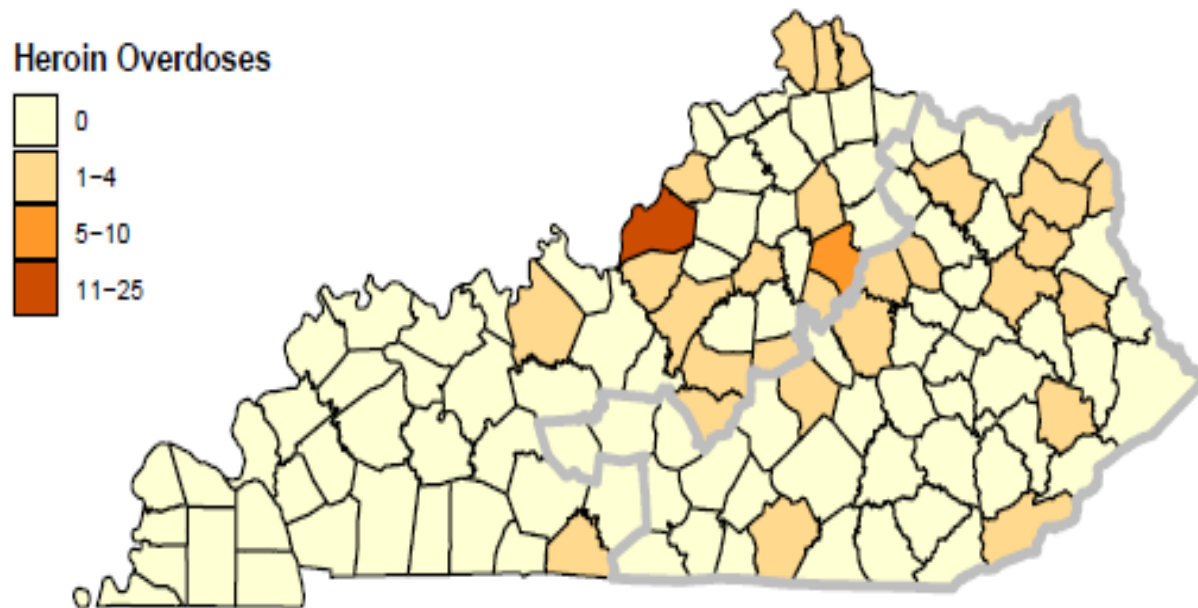
Gray line denotes Appalachian counties.



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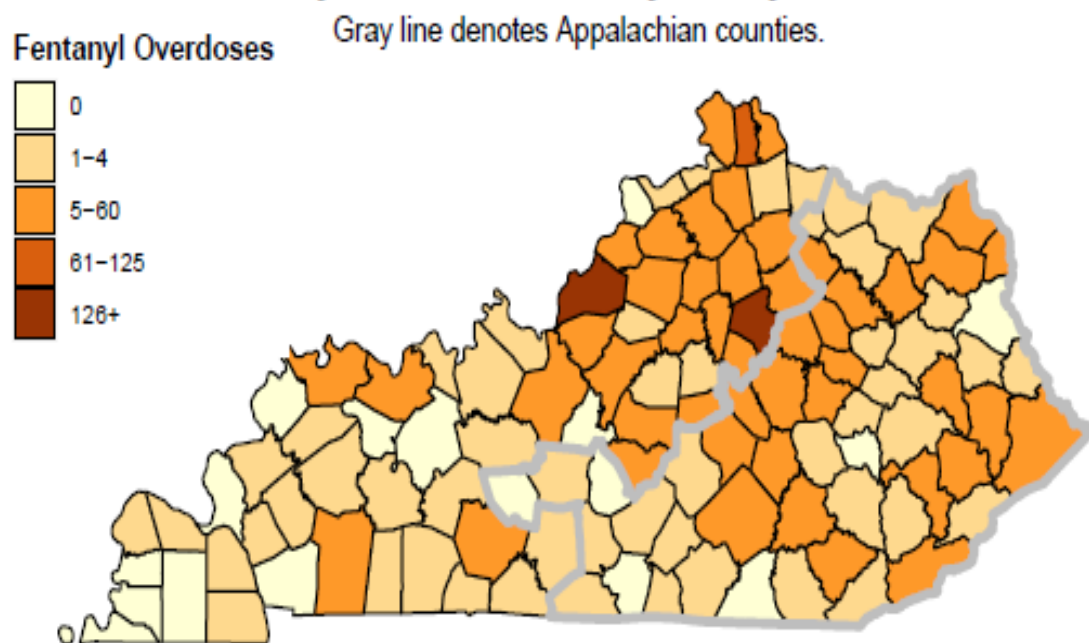
Count of Heroin Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020

Gray line denotes Appalachian counties.



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Count of Fentanyl Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020

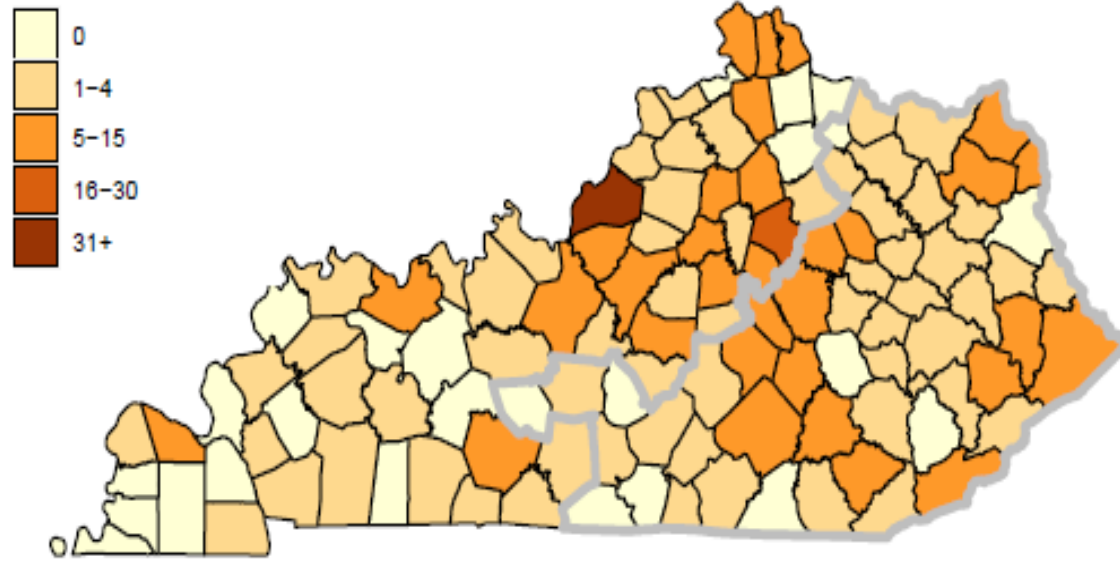


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Count of Methamphetamine Overdose Deaths by County of Residence, 2020

Methamphetamine
Overdoses

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