

Opioid-Related News and the Courts

Weekly Review

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National

[The epidemic in the pandemic](#)

Johns Hopkins University

Opioid overdose deaths have quietly accelerated in the past year, a fact overshadowed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. [According to the CDC](#), more than 81,000 people died of a drug overdose in the 12 months ending in May 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period.

While the data marks an increase in overdose deaths following the beginning of the U.S. lockdown period in May, information beyond that time is difficult to come by, painting an incomplete picture of the current status of the opioid epidemic.

To fill in the data gaps and help experts develop their plans to combat the opioid epidemic, first-year student Atharva Bhagwat has begun cataloging every public report of overdoses nationwide as part of the [Bloomberg Opioid Initiative](#), a \$50 million collaboration between Vital Strategies, the Pew Charitable Trusts, Johns Hopkins University, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the CDC Foundation.

Through a public service Twitter account, [Epidemic in the Pandemic](#), Bhagwat notes and retweets every article that cites overdose data from local news outlets across the country. In addition to the watchdog social media effort, he tracks the stories in a public spreadsheet that now includes more than 350 articles from the past 10 months, as well as a map that visualizes trends across America.

Maine

[Mills Administration Commends Enhanced Reporting of Drug Overdose Data](#)

Office of the Governor

The Mills Administration today commended the [Maine Office of the Attorney General's release](#) of new monthly reports on fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses in Maine that will inform critical response strategies by treatment providers, first responders, health care providers and law enforcement to help save the lives of Maine people.

[The] more detailed monthly updates will replace quarterly assessments and fulfill a goal of the State's Opioid Response Strategic Plan, which calls for more timely and transparent data in order to identify trends and allocate resources faster in response to drug overdoses.

The new monthly reports also include non-fatal overdoses, ensuring greater attention on Maine people and communities at high risk of drug overdoses, and accelerating efforts to assist them in seeking substance use treatment, counseling, or pursuing other harm reduction strategies.

Ohio

[Ohio Supreme Court, Pharmacy Board team up to monitor drug court participants](#)

WKBN

Ohio is the first state in the country to combine the resources of the judicial system with the healthcare community in order to monitor the abuse of pharmaceuticals.

In collaboration with the Ohio Board of Pharmacy, the Supreme Court will utilize information from active adult drug court participants and report it to the state's prescription drug monitoring program known as OARRS – The Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System.

It is the first program in the United States to have a direct notification method between the judicial and healthcare realms to prevent pharmaceutical misuse.

“The specialized docket courts and the treatment community have always sought innovative ways to tackle the drug epidemic,” Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor said. “This is the latest example of Ohio being at the forefront with alternative measures to address complex issues.”

[For more information on OARRS, visit: www.pharmacy.ohio.gov/OARRS.]