



Opioids and the Courts News: May 24, 2019

National

[Nation's Eyes Swivel To Oklahoma As High-Stakes Opioid Trial Against Drugmakers Kicks Off Next Week](#)

Kaiser Health News

The hearing is the first public trial to emerge from roughly 2,000 U.S. lawsuits aimed at holding drug companies accountable for their alleged role in the nation's raging opioid crisis. "I expect a very spirited trial," said local attorney and author Bob Burke. In other news on the epidemic: JPMorgan cuts ties with Purdue Pharma, the American Pain Society is considering filing for bankruptcy, and buprenorphine gains popularity as an addiction treatment.

National

[In Cities Where It Once Reigned, Heroin Is Disappearing](#)

New York Times

Heroin's presence is fading up and down the Eastern Seaboard, from New England mill towns to rural Appalachia, and in parts of the Midwest that were overwhelmed by it a few years back. It remains prevalent in many Western states, but even New York City, the nation's biggest distribution hub for the drug, has seen less of it this year.

The diminishing supply should be a victory for public health and law enforcement alike. Instead, in cities like Baltimore, longtime users who managed to survive decades injecting heroin are now at far higher risk of dying from an overdose. That is because synthetic fentanyl, a deadlier drug that is much cheaper to produce and distribute than heroin, has all but replaced it.

National

[Fighting fentanyl: Trump administration struggles to confront the deadliest drug crisis in U.S. history](#)

Washington Post

The CDC data obtained by The Post documents for the first time the 10 places with the highest per capita fentanyl-related overdose death rates: five counties in Ohio, two in West Virginia and one in Kentucky and the cities of Baltimore and St. Louis. Local health officials told The Post they are still not receiving enough federal money to fund drug treatment programs to wean people off highly addictive opioids or launch prevention programs to warn people of the dangers of fentanyl.

In Cabell County, W.Va., the county with the highest fentanyl overdose death rate in the nation, there are long waiting lists for treatment.

"When somebody is saying, 'I'm ready for treatment' and they want help, they shouldn't have to wait six months, six weeks or six days," said Steve Williams, mayor of



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Huntington, the county seat of Cabell. “They should be able to get in a treatment program within six hours.”

In Ohio, deaths from fentanyl have ravaged vast sections of the state. In 2015, there were 1,255 synthetic-opioid-related deaths, most from fentanyl. By the end of 2017, that number had nearly tripled to 3,572.

Florida

[Florida appeals court stays AG’s opioids suit to weigh disqualification of trial judge](#)

Reuters

But now some of the defendants in the Florida attorney general’s suit are going after a judge for his comments about them. This week, Allergan, Actavis, Teva, Cephalon, Endo and Mallinckrodt filed a petition asking a state appeals court to disqualify Pasco County Circuit Court Judge Declan Mansfield, arguing that the judge’s comments at a hearing on [the] defendants’ dismissal motion suggest that he is biased against them and cannot give defendants a fair trial.

The defendants provided a full transcript of the hearing as part of an April 12 motion asking Judge Mansfield to recuse himself. His allegedly biased remarks were contained in one off-the-cuff riff that was prompted by a mention of tobacco companies. The judge said that opioid defendants “learned from tobacco companies what to do, to try and misrepresent,” and compared the defendants to “ostriches” ignoring the facts of opioid abuse. He posited that pharma defendants had engaged in “a concerted effort” and “manufactured” the crisis of prescription opioid abuse.

The judge also said he had firsthand experience of the epidemic. In “our community of Hudson,” he said, there were 2.2 million pills prescribed in just one year. “That doesn’t surprise me,” he said. “If you had lived here, you would have seen the caravan of buses coming down from other states and getting prescriptions filled at an alarming rate.”

