



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**  
Ashwin Vasana, MD, PhD  
Commissioner

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **OVERDOSE CONTINUES TO RISE IN NYC AS HARM REDUCTION PROGRAMMING SCALES UP**

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**April 14, 2022** — Fentanyl has driven an increase in overdose deaths in the first two quarters of 2021. These increases – which have been seen both in New York City and across the nation – follow a year in which overdose fatalities reached record numbers. To prevent overdose and support New Yorkers, the Health Department continues to invest in programming.

“The overdose epidemic is taking one New Yorker from us every four hours, and is a public health crisis that has touched far too many people,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasana**. “The Health Department is committed to reducing overdose deaths through evidence-based strategies, and continuing to work with peers, community partners and service providers to innovate and save lives.”

In the first two quarters of 2021, there were 1,233 overdose deaths in New York City, compared to 965 overdose deaths during the same period in 2020, according to a [newly released Health Department report](#).

If these trends continue, the Health Department expects the number of overdose deaths in 2021 to exceed those in 2020, which saw the highest number of overdoses in New York City since records began in 2000.

To address the overdose crisis, New York City has expanded services and launched first-of-their-kind programs.

For example, on November 30, 2021, the first publicly recognized Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs) in the nation opened in New York City. Operated by OnPoint NYC at two sites in Washington Heights and East Harlem, OPC services have been used over 14,000 times by more than 1,000 individuals. As of April 3, staff have averted over 230 overdoses since opening. OPCs provide wraparound services for people who use drugs, connecting them to social services, care, and treatment.

Additionally, last year the City committed an additional \$9 million investment to raise awareness about fentanyl, reduce harm through increased capacity of syringe service programs and increased access to naloxone, and expand buprenorphine treatment for people who are unstably housed. Since March 2021, the City has:

- Launched the “Let’s Talk Fentanyl” public awareness campaign and disseminated a direct mailer to all NYC residences about fentanyl and overdose prevention.
- Established drug-checking services at one SSP and significantly expanded fentanyl test strip availability. DOHMH launched two pilot programs to establish community-based fentanyl test strip distribution and fund community outreach and education about fentanyl and overdose prevention in neighborhoods with high rates of overdose.
- Piloted program of community ambassadors with lived experience of substance use to engage and provide fentanyl test strips, naloxone, and harm reduction education to older Black New Yorkers and Puerto Rican New Yorkers in Harlem and the South Bronx. Ambassadors completed 601 engagements and distributed 315 naloxone kits to people at high risk of overdose.
- Expanded SSP outreach and drop-in center operations to provide harm reduction services and clean up syringe litter in Washington Heights, Midtown West, East Harlem, and the South Bronx.

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