

————— *El Paso County* —————

QUARTERLY DATA BRIEF
Spotlight on Fentanyl



Fentanyl
indications

Data Brief

PARTNER PARTICIPATION



Susan
Wheelan
Director,
El Paso County
Public Health



Dr. Leon
Kelly
Coroner,
El Paso County
Coroner's Office



Michael
Allen
District Attorney,
4th Judicial District



Joseph
Roybal
Sheriff,
El Paso County
Sheriff's Office



Pete
Carey
Executive Director,
El Paso County
Justice Services
Department



EL PASO COUNTY
Department of Justice Services



Stacie Kwitek-
Russell
Executive Director,
El Paso County
Department of
Human Services



EL PASO COUNTY
Department of Human Services

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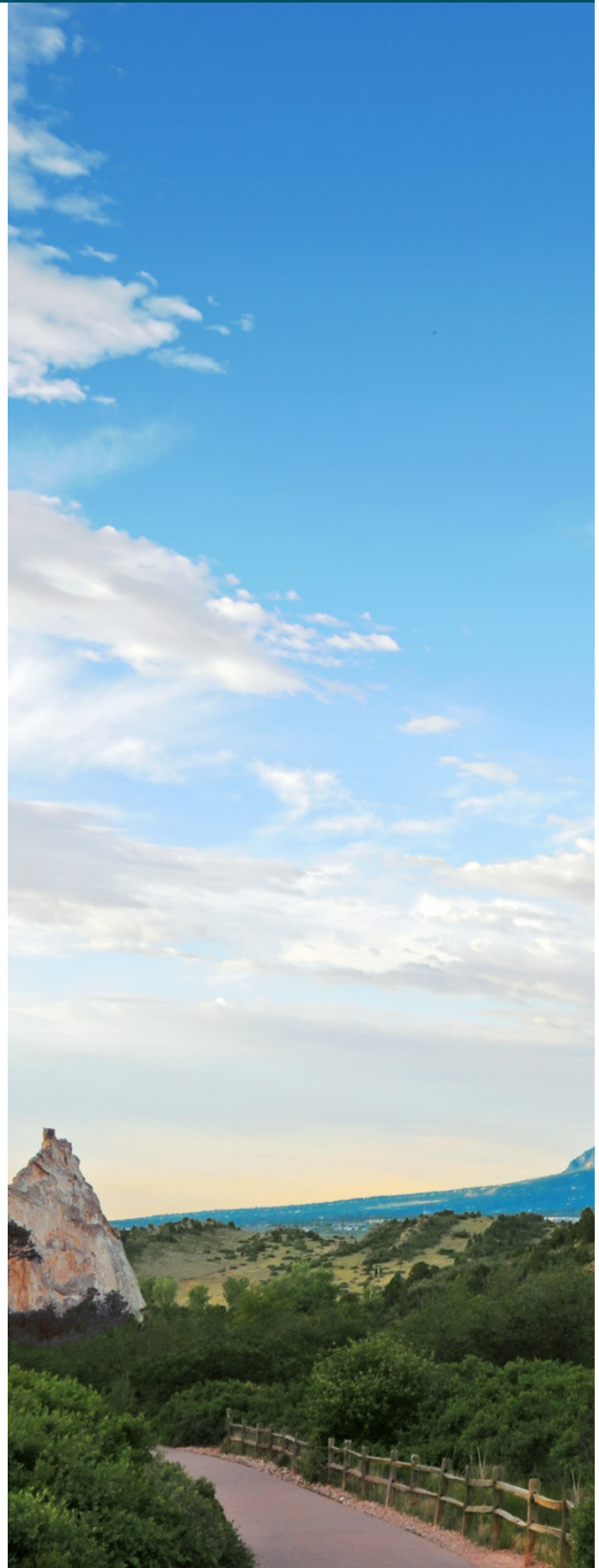
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What is an opioid?

Opioids are a class of drugs used to reduce pain. They are an important tool for health care providers to manage pain in patients. They can be used to treat moderate to severe pain and are often prescribed following an injury or surgery, or for chronic health conditions such as cancer. However, when these medications are used inappropriately, it can lead to an increase in the risk of misuse, overdose, and possible death.

Opioids can cause sleepiness, slowed breathing, confusion, and nausea; however, they can also act on regions of the brain that increase feelings of euphoria and well-being. This is more often the case when opioids are taken at a higher-than-prescribed dose or taken in other ways — not the intended use.

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, meaning it is made in a lab, and not a naturally occurring substance. It is often used for severe pain management, particularly in hospital settings. There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical and illicitly manufactured fentanyl (IMF). Pharmaceutical fentanyl is prescribed by doctors to treat severe pain. IMF is sold for its ability to produce good feelings. It is often mixed into illegal drugs and pills made to look like prescription medications.

What makes fentanyl different from other opioids is that it is much more powerful—up to 100 times more powerful—than morphine. Due to its strength, only a small amount is needed to manage pain, when used appropriately. When added to illicitly manufactured drugs, even in small doses, it can be deadly. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “over 150 people die every day from overdoses related to synthetic opioids like fentanyl.”



The difference between proper drug use and drug misuse.

Proper use of medications means using the proper medication at the right time and the right dose as directed by your doctor. You should only take medicines for their intended purpose. You should never experiment with medicines and medicine combinations, and you should never take medicines intended for someone else, such as a family member or friend. You should only take your medications when necessary and should not use them for shorter or longer than prescribed by your doctor. Taking your medication at the proper time, as outlined by your doctor or pharmacist, may impact your body's ability to absorb the medication properly and may also help to reduce any side effects associated with the medication.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), misuse of prescription drugs means taking a medication in a manner or dose that is other than what your doctor prescribed. This includes taking someone else's medication, such as a family or friend, or taking it only to produce good feelings. The three medications that are most commonly misused drugs are:

- Opioids—used to treat pain;
- Drugs that slow the activity of your brain—such as tranquilizers, sedatives, and hypnotics; and
- Stimulants—prescribed to treat attention-deficit or hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Source: *National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). 2023, March 6. Overview. Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/overview-on-2023>, June 14.*



Illicitly Manufactured Fentanyl (IMF)

The reason fentanyl is a major contributor to deadly overdoses in the U.S. is its link to IMF, which is distributed through illegal drug markets. IMF is often added to other drugs because of its strength, which leads to a more powerful effect. This allows it to become more addictive and more dangerous. However, people who use illicit drugs do not know the ingredients of the products or the amount of fentanyl—some could contain deadly doses of fentanyl, depending on how much a person takes.

The problem with this is that illicit drugs do not list ingredients of their products—many contain deadly doses of fentanyl.

IMF is available on the drug market in different forms, including pills, liquid and powder. Powdered fentanyl looks like many other drugs. It is commonly mixed with heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine; it can be made into pills that resemble other prescription opioids or even resemble or have a candy-like appearance. In its liquid form, IMF can be found in nasal sprays, eye drops and dropped onto paper or small candies.

Many people do not know their drugs are laced with fentanyl. A drug is laced when two or more substances are mixed. You cannot detect deadly levels of fentanyl by looking at it, tasting it or smelling it. It is nearly impossible to tell if drugs have been laced with fentanyl; however, there are now test strips available that are inexpensive and typically give results within five minutes—which can be the difference between life and death.

Source:
www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html

Rainbow fentanyl

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50x stronger than heroin and 100x stronger than morphine.

CDC – The facts about fentanyl



IMF liquid fentanyl and powder fentanyl





State impact

Overdose deaths involving fentanyl started to double year over year in the state of Colorado from 2016 to 2021 — with an increase in deaths from 102 to 912 across that time period. From 2021 to 2022, there was still a year over year increase from 912 deaths in 2021 to 920 deaths in 2022.

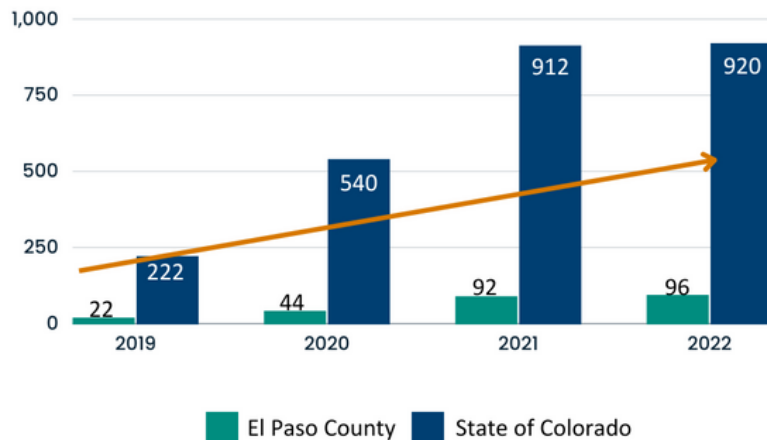
In looking at 2022 data, among 920 overdose deaths involving fentanyl:

- 44 (four percent) were veterans.
- 783 (85 percent) of fentanyl-related deaths were among White people.
- While deaths were reported across all age groups including children and the elderly, those most impacted were 25 to 34 years (296 deaths) and 35 to 44 years (248 deaths), accounting for 59 percent of the total.
- Deaths among males far exceeded those among females (660 versus 260).

Source: *Vital Statistics, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment*

El Paso County impact

Overdose deaths involving fentanyl



Overdose deaths involving fentanyl for El Paso County residents totaled 96 for 2022, up from 92 in 2021.






In looking at 2022 data, among 96 overdose deaths involving fentanyl:

- 70 (73 percent) were male.
- 9 (9 percent) were veterans.
- 78 (81 percent) were among White people.
- The ages most impacted were 25-44 years, (61 deaths) which accounted for 64 percent of the total.

As a result of a national settlement with fentanyl distributors/manufacturers, Colorado will be receiving about 400 million dollars over the next 18 years to fight the opioid epidemic. The share for Region 16 (El Paso and Teller Counties) will be about 20 million dollars.

You can learn more here:
www.elpasoco.com/regional-opioid-council/

Fentanyl overdose deaths by age El Paso County 2022

Ages: 15 - 24		13
Ages: 25 - 34		32
Ages: 35 - 44		29
Ages: 45 - 54		10
Ages: 55 - 64		10

Naloxone (Narcan)

*Naloxone is available in all
50 states.*

Can you treat a fentanyl/opioid overdose?

Yes, but timing is critical. Naloxone, often referred to by the brand name Narcan, is a life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids—including fentanyl, heroin, and prescription opioid medications—when given in time. It's important to still call 9-1-1 at the first sign of an overdose, even if naloxone has been used. Learn more about naloxone at www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/naloxone.

Find out where you can obtain naloxone at www.stoptheclockcolorado.org/.



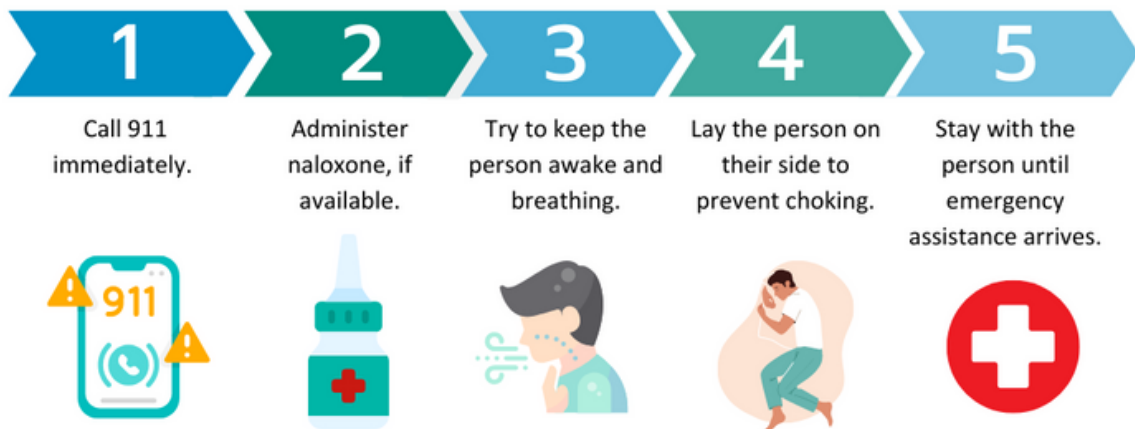
CDC guidance - signs of overdose

Recognizing the signs of opioid overdose can save a life. Here are some things to look for:

- Small, constricted “pinpoint pupils”
- Falling asleep or losing consciousness
- Slow, weak or no breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds
- Limp body
- Cold and/or clammy skin
- Discolored skin (especially in lips and nails)

What to do if you think someone is overdosing

It may be hard to tell whether a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you aren't sure, treat it like an overdose—you could save a life.



Resources

If you or someone close to you needs help for a substance use disorder, talk to your doctor or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP or go to [SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#).

How can you get involved in community prevention efforts?

Safely dispose of unused or expired prescription medications.

- The Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention offers resources and locations for safe disposal of unused and expired medications at www.takemedsseriously.org/safe-disposal.
- The Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA) Diversion Control Administration offers a way to [search for sites](#) near your zip code or city that offer ongoing disposal.

Educate yourself and your loved ones on the dangers of opioids and fentanyl. You can learn more about the signs of an overdose and what to do if you think someone is overdosing at www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl.



Additional resources

- Call 1-944-493-TALK (8255) or text "TALK" to 38255
- Find behavioral health administrator (BH) licensed providers in your area: www.ownpath.co

Emerging Trend

What is xylazine?

Xylazine is a non-opioid sedative or tranquilizer that is not approved for use in people; it is licensed for use ONLY in veterinary medicine. Xylazine is increasingly being found in the US illegal drug supply, and illegal drugs such as cocaine, heroin and fentanyl can be mixed with xylazine. People who use illegal drugs may not be aware of the presence of xylazine, or choose to use mixed drugs for a stronger effect.

What are the health risks of xylazine?

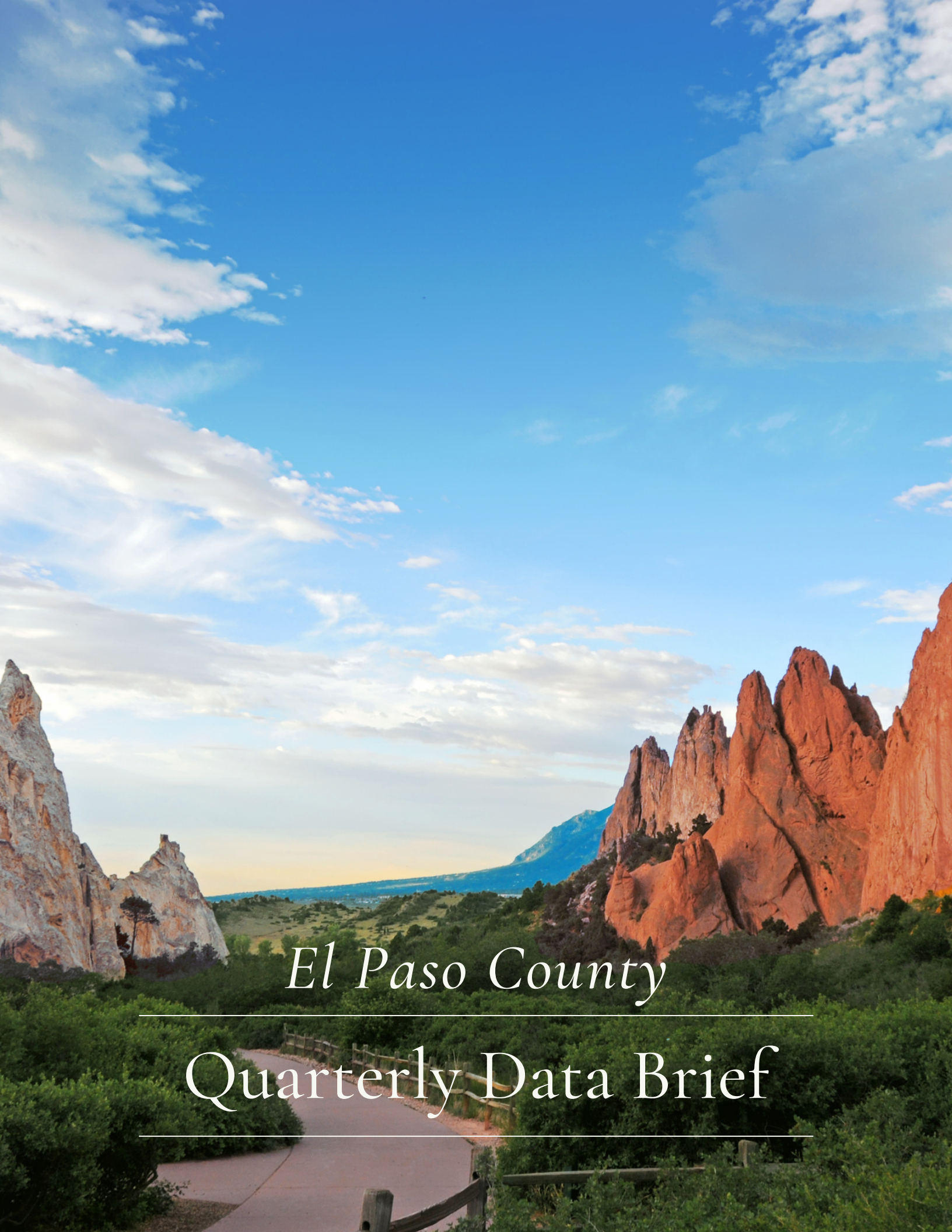
Xylazine has been known to cause dangerous slowing of breathing, potentially as an additive effect when taken alongside opioids such as fentanyl. These overdoses can be difficult to identify because they appear similar to that of an opioid overdose.

Should naloxone be given in the case of an overdose involving xylazine?

It's important to note that naloxone—often referred to by the brand name Narcan—will not reverse the effects of xylazine. However, naloxone should be given in response to any suspected drug overdose to reverse any possible opioid effects. This is because xylazine is often used with opioids like fentanyl. It's important to call 911 for additional medical treatment, especially since the effects of xylazine may continue after naloxone is given.

Sources:

- www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/The%20Growing%20Threat%20of%20Xylazine%20and%20its%20Mixture%20with%20Illicit%20Drugs.pdf
- <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/xylazine>



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