Report to
The Vermont Legislature

Drug Poisoning (Overdose) Fatalities Report

In Accordance with Act 75, Section 18a (b)
An Act Relating to Strengthening Vermont's Response to Opioid Addiction and Methamphetamine Abuse

Submitted to:	**House Committees on Human Services and on Health Care; Senate Committee on Health and Welfare; and House and Senate Committees on Judiciary**
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Report date:	**March 1, 2014**

VERMONT
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Drug Poisoning (Overdose) Fatalities Report
March 1, 2014

Introduction

In accordance with **Act 75**, **Section 18a (b),** the Vermont Department of Health submits the following annual report on the:

- Number of persons who died during the preceding calendar year from an overdose of a Schedule II, III, or IV controlled substance,
- Number of those whose deaths involved an opioid, and
- Number of persons whose deaths involved an opioid who were administered an opioid antagonist, and if so, who administered the antagonist. Beginning with the 2015 report, data from previous years regarding antagonist administration will be presented for comparison purposes.

This report utilizes information from Vermont Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in order to address the legislative request. The time period of this report is January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2013. During that period there were 62 drug poisoning (overdoses) fatalities involving a Schedule II, III or IV drug, 51 of which involved a prescription opioid.

Drug poisoning (overdose) fatalities involving a Schedule II, III or IV drug

Data Analysis Methodology

The Medical Examiner's Office has statutory authority under Vermont law to investigate deaths when a person dies from:

- Violence; suddenly, when in apparent good health; unattended by a physician or a recognized practitioner of a well-established church; by casualty; by suicide; as a result of injury; in jail or prison or in a mental institution; in any unusual, unnatural or suspicious manner; or
- Circumstances involving a hazard to public health, welfare, or safety.

The data presented in this report come directly from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and are based on deaths that occurred in Vermont. Most drug-related fatalities in Vermont are due to combinations of substances (e.g., a prescription opioid and cocaine), not a single drug. The circumstances under which each fatality occurs are unique. In addition, not all drug-related fatalities can be attributed to addiction and/or dependence.

These fatalities include accidents, suicides and undetermined drug fatalities. This report does *not* include deaths that are due to the consequences of chronic substance use such as HIV, liver disease, or infection. This report also does *not* include deaths that are due to injury such as car crashes related to substance use or abuse.

Analysis

Figure 1 presents the number of drug poisoning (overdose) fatalities involving a Schedule II, III or IV drug in Vermont that were due to accident or undetermined intention (non-suicide). Figure 2 depicts the number of drug poisoning (overdose) fatalities involving a Schedule II, III or IV drug in Vermont that were due to suicides.

Figure 1 **Number of fatalities resulting from accidental drug poisoning (overdose) from Schedule II, III or IV drugs in Vermont.**

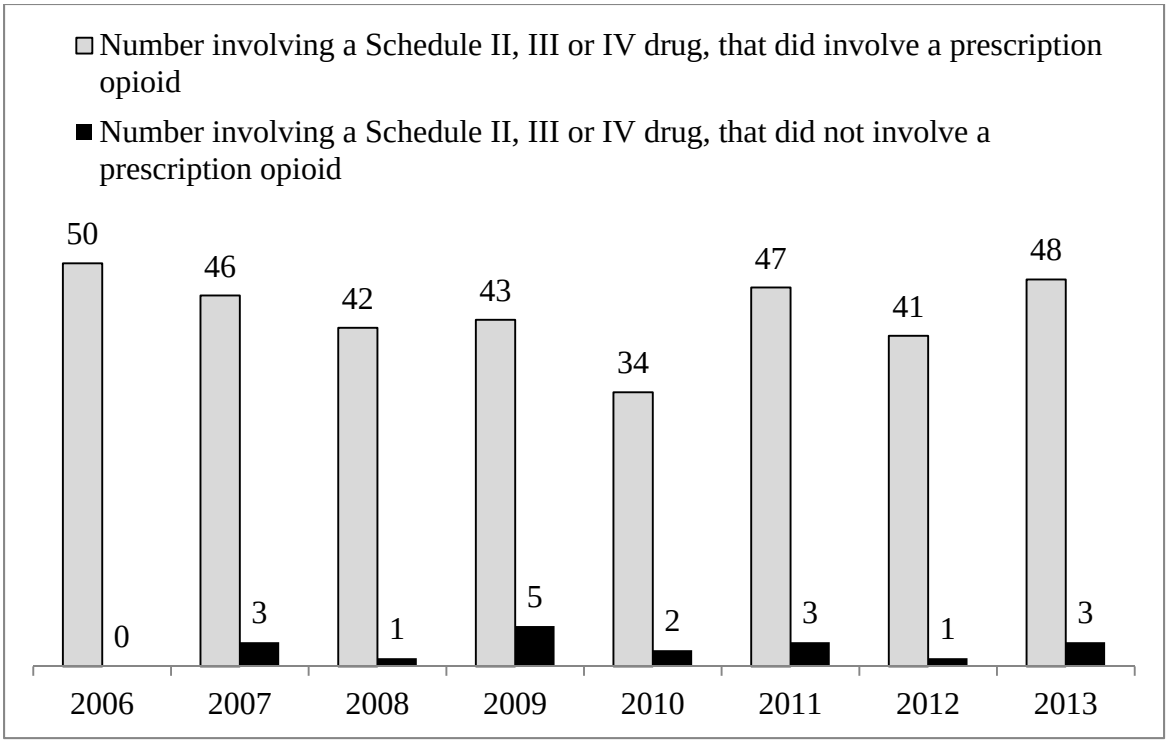
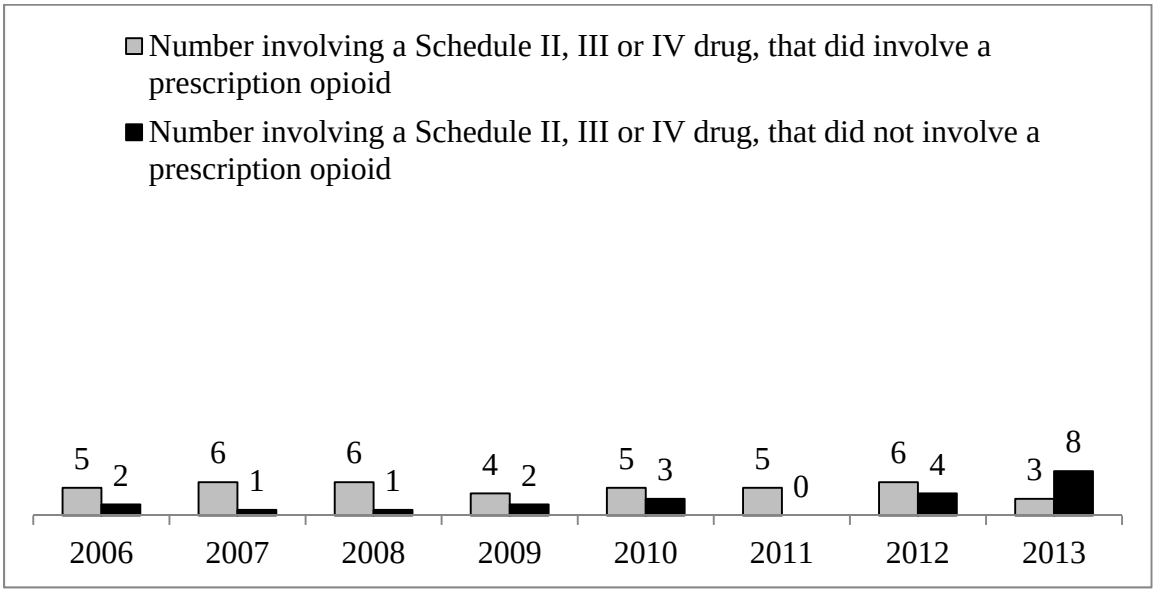


Figure 2 **Number of suicides resulting from drug poisoning (overdose) from Schedule II, III or IV drugs in Vermont.**



The 2013 numbers may change slightly if further cases are clarified or additional information is gathered on a specific case.

While data on naloxone administration cannot be obtained from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner or the Death Certificate, the Naloxone antagonist pilot project called for in Act 75, Section 18 will include a review of hospital discharge data, emergency responder data, and data from the Naloxone pilot. This information (which will include trend information) will be detailed in the 2015 version of this report.

Conclusion

According to data from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, the number of drug poisonings (overdose) fatalities involving a Schedule II, III or IV drug does not show any specific trend since 2006. In addition, the number of drug poisonings (overdose) fatalities involving a Schedule II, III or IV drug as well as a prescription opioid has not shown any specific trend since 2006.

Data involving opioid antagonists will be made available with trend information in the report to be released in the year 2015.

Appendix A

No. 75. An act relating to strengthening Vermont's response to opioid addiction and methamphetamine abuse.

Sec. 18a. 18 V.S.A. § 5208 is amended to read:

§ 5208. HEALTH DEPARTMENT; REPORT ON STATISTICS

(b) In addition to the report required by subsection (a) of this section and notwithstanding the provisions of 2 V.S.A. § 20(d), beginning March 1, 2014 and annually thereafter, the Department shall report to the House Committees on Human Services and on Health Care, the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, and the House and Senate Committees on Judiciary regarding the number of persons who died during the preceding calendar year from an overdose of a Schedule II, III, or IV controlled substance. The report shall list separately the number of deaths specifically related to opioids, including for each death whether an opioid antagonist was administered and whether it was administered by persons other than emergency medical personnel, firefighters, or law enforcement officers. Beginning in 2015, the report shall include similar data from prior years to allow for comparison.

Appendix B

Definition of Controlled Substance Schedules

Drugs and other substances that are considered controlled substances under the federal Controlled Substances Act (CSA) are divided into five schedules. An updated and complete list of the schedules is published annually in **Title 21 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) §§ 1308.11 through 1308.15**. Substances are placed in their respective schedules based on whether they have a currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States, their relative abuse potential, and likelihood of causing dependence when abused. Some examples of the drugs in each schedule are listed below.

Schedule I Controlled Substances

Substances in this schedule have no currently accepted medical use in the United States, a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision, and a high potential for abuse.

Some examples of substances listed in Schedule I are: heroin, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), marijuana (cannabis), peyote, methaqualone, and 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine ("Ecstasy").

Schedule II Controlled Substances

Substances in this schedule have a high potential for abuse which may lead to severe psychological or physical dependence.

Examples of Schedule II narcotics include: hydromorphone (Dilaudid®), methadone (Dolophine®), meperidine (Demerol®), oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®), and fentanyl (Sublimaze®, Duragesic®). Other Schedule II narcotics include: morphine, opium, and codeine.

Schedule III Controlled Substances

Substances in this schedule have a potential for abuse less than substances in Schedules I or II and abuse may lead to moderate or low physical dependence or high psychological dependence.

Examples of Schedule III narcotics include: combination products containing less than 15 milligrams of hydrocodone per dosage unit (Vicodin®), products containing not more than 90 milligrams of codeine per dosage unit (Tylenol with Codeine®), and buprenorphine (Suboxone®).

Schedule IV Controlled Substances

Substances in this schedule have a low potential for abuse relative to substances in Schedule III.

Examples of Schedule IV substances include: alprazolam (Xanax®), carisoprodol (Soma®), clonazepam (Klonopin®), clorazepate (Tranxene®), diazepam (Valium®), lorazepam (Ativan®), midazolam (Versed®), temazepam (Restoril®), and triazolam (Halcion®).