



NFLIS Brief: Fentanyl, 2001–2015

The updated findings presented in this NFLIS Brief should not be compared with annual fentanyl data published previously by NFLIS.

The National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) is a program of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Diversion Control Division, which systematically collects drug identification results and associated information from drug cases submitted to and analyzed by Federal, State, and local forensic laboratories. NFLIS serves the forensic and law enforcement communities by providing updated findings on changing trends of drugs submitted to and analyzed by the Nation's forensic laboratories. This publication presents updated findings on fentanyl submitted to State and local laboratories from January 1, 2001, through December 31, 2015, and analyzed within three months of each calendar year reporting period.

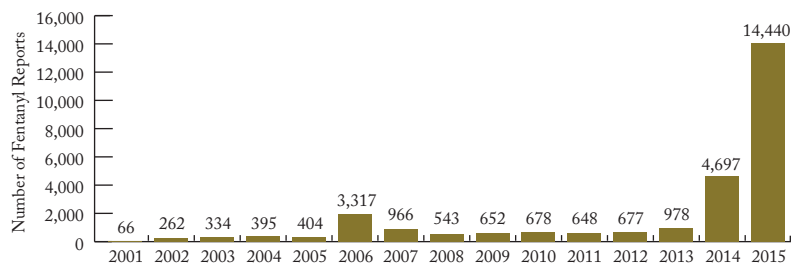
Drug Facts

- Fentanyl is approximately 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more powerful than morphine.¹
- Fentanyl-related overdose deaths increased from about 550 deaths in 2013 to more than 2,000 deaths in 2014 and 2015.¹
- Although pharmaceutical fentanyl is diverted for abuse in the United States, the majority of fentanyl drug reports and fentanyl reported with other drugs results from clandestinely produced and trafficked fentanyl, not diverted pharmaceutical fentanyl.²

National Estimates

Figure 1 presents national annual estimates of fentanyl that were submitted to State and local laboratories from January 2001 through December 2015 that were analyzed within three months of each calendar year reporting period. Nationally, fentanyl reports remained steady from 2002 to 2005, followed by a noticeable increase in 2006. Fentanyl reports then decreased in 2007 and continued to remain fairly steady until dramatic increases occurred in 2014 and 2015.

Figure 1 National annual estimates of fentanyl reports in NFLIS, January 2001–December 2015¹



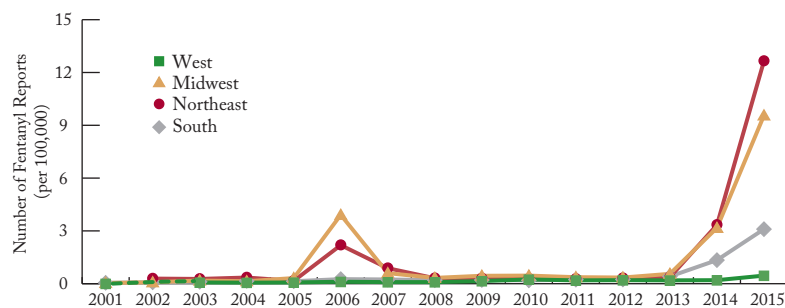
¹Includes fentanyl reports submitted to laboratories from January 1, 2001, through December 31, 2015, and analyzed within three months of each calendar year reporting period.

Regional Trends

Of the 14,440 fentanyl reports identified in 2015, more than three-quarters were identified by laboratories in the Northeast (5,896 reports) and Midwest (5,253 reports). About one-fifth of fentanyl reports were identified by laboratories in the South (3,013 reports). Few fentanyl reports were identified by laboratories in the West (278 reports).

Figure 2 shows that fentanyl reports substantially increased in 2006 in the Midwest and Northeast, followed by a decrease in 2007. Fentanyl reports remained steady from 2007 through 2013 for all regions and then dramatically increased in 2014 and 2015 in the Midwest, Northeast, and South. In the West, fentanyl reports showed a more gradual increase from 2001 to 2014, followed by a significant increase in 2015.

Figure 2 NFLIS regional trends in fentanyl reported per 100,000 persons aged 15 or older, January 2001–December 2015¹



Note: U.S. census 2015 population data by age were not available for this publication. Population data for 2015 were imputed.

¹A dashed trend line indicates that estimates did not meet the criteria for precision or reliability, including the 2002 estimate in the West and the 2001 estimate in the Northeast.

Fentanyl Reports, by State

The geographic data presented in this section are actual reported data rather than national and regional estimates. The data are based on information provided to the forensic laboratories by the submitting law enforcement agencies in the county of origin associated with the drug seizure incident. It is important to note that these data represent only those items that were submitted to and analyzed by forensic laboratories. In addition, a small number of laboratories within a few States were not reporting data to NFLIS, and their absence may affect the relative distribution of drugs seized and analyzed.

As shown in Figure 3, a total of 14 States reported analyzing fentanyl during 2001. During that time, no State had more than 19 fentanyl reports. The States reporting fentanyl in 2001 were mainly located in the South or Midwest. By 2006, the number of States reporting fentanyl more than doubled to 37, and by 2011, the number increased to 43. By 2015, all but 1 State reported analyzing fentanyl, including 17 that had 100 or more reports, 7 that had between 50 and 99 reports, 10 that had between 20 and 49 reports, and 15 that had between 1 and 19 reports (Figure 4). The States with the highest numbers of fentanyl reports in 2015 were in the Northeast and South, with sizeable numbers also being reported in the Midwest.

Figure 3 Fentanyl reports in NFLIS, by State, 2001

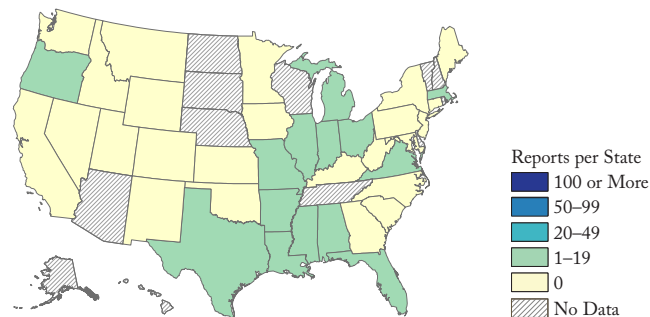
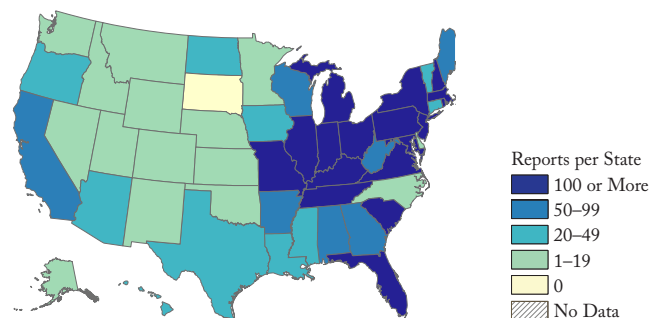


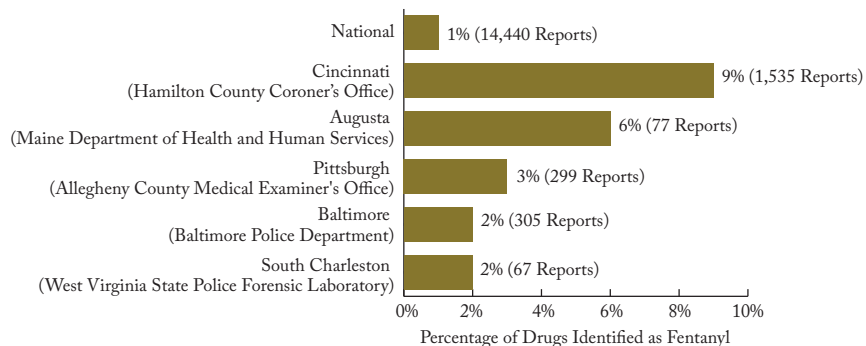
Figure 4 Fentanyl reports in NFLIS, by State, 2015



Fentanyl Reports, by City

NFLIS can be used to monitor drugs reported by forensic laboratories across the country, including laboratories in large U.S. cities. Figure 5 presents laboratories representing cities with the highest percentage of drug analysis results of all drugs (up to three per laboratory item) that were identified as fentanyl during 2015.

Figure 5 Drugs identified as fentanyl in NFLIS, by selected cities, 2015¹



¹Includes fentanyl reports submitted to laboratories from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2015, and analyzed within three months of the calendar year reporting period.

References

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, Diversion Control Division, Drug & Chemical Evaluation Section. (2016, December). *Fentanyl*. Retrieved from https://www.dea/diversion.usdoj.gov/drug_chem_info/fentanyl.pdf

² U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, Strategic Intelligence Section. (2016, June). *National heroin threat assessment summary - updated* (DEA Intelligence Report DEA-DCT-DIR-031-16). Retrieved from https://www.dea.gov/divisions/hq/2016/hq062716_attach.pdf

Methodology: A summary of the NFLIS estimation methodology can be found in the *NFLIS Statistical Methodology* publication at <https://www.nflis.dea/diversion.usdoj.gov/DesktopModules/ReportDownloads/Reports/NFLIS2014StatMethodology.pdf>.

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