

BENZODIAZEPINE FATAL DRUG OVERDOSES IN TENNESSEE

In Tennessee, overdoses with benzodiazepines present on toxicology increased between 2019 and 2021. Polysubstance overdoses involving both prescription and illicit benzodiazepines have increased in the last 10 years. The characteristics of prescription and illicit benzodiazepine fatal drug overdoses are described below. To learn more, read the full article [here](#).



BENZODIAZEPINE PRESENT

1,666

OUT OF 5,916 TOTAL FATAL
OVERDOSES WITH TOXICOLOGY
FROM 2019 TO 2021

81% vs 12%

**PRESCRIPTION
BENZODIAZEPINE**

**ILLICIT
BENZODIAZEPINE**

PRESCRIPTION OR ILLICIT?

Illicit benzodiazepines are different from prescription. They are made illicitly, not by pharmaceutical entities, often mimicking the effects of their prescription counterparts. There is growing concern of their use as overdoses have increased substantially in recent years. Despite the increase, prescription benzodiazepines still account for more fatal drug overdoses in the US.



8 OUT OF 10

overdoses with prescription benzodiazepine
present on toxicology did not have a
prescription within 30 days of death

**PRESCRIPTION
BENZODIAZEPINE**

**ILLICIT
BENZODIAZEPINE**

69% vs 83%

FENTANYL PRESENT

Differences between prescription and illicit benzodiazepine-involved fatal overdoses were identified, including age, co-occurring substances, mental health conditions, and urban or rural residence. Knowing these differences can help inform outreach and prevention efforts.

GOING FORWARD...

Incorporating treatment for substance use disorders and mental health conditions concurrently could reduce benzodiazepine-involved fatal drug overdoses in Tennessee. Most benzodiazepine-involved overdoses also involved fentanyl or another opioid. Naloxone and fentanyl test strip distribution and education are important for overdose prevention and harm reduction.