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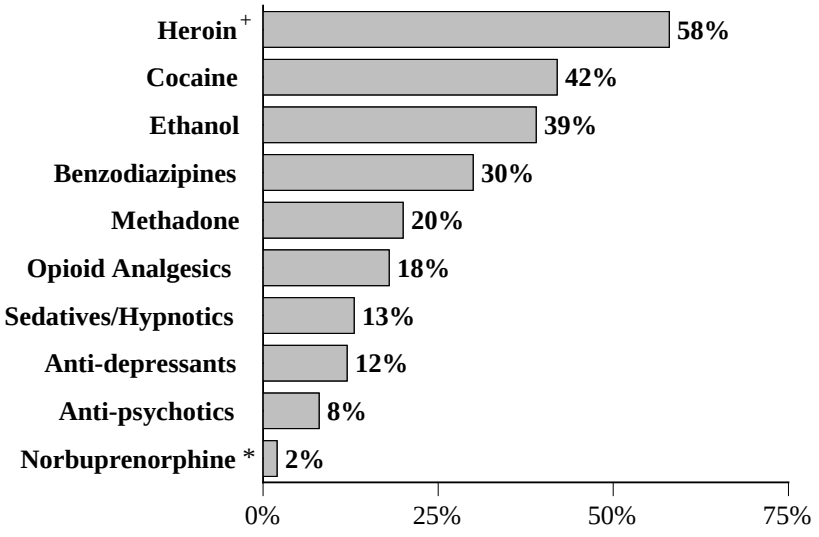
Buprenorphine Rarely Detected in NYC Unintentional Fatal Overdoses in 2013; Heroin Most Commonly Detected Drug

In an analysis of postmortem toxicology screenings from a retrospective sample of 98 unintentional fatal drug overdoses from June to October 2013 in New York City, the four most commonly detected substances were heroin[+] (58%), cocaine (42%), ethanol (39%), and benzodiazipines (30%). Only 2 cases out of the 98 total cases tested positive for the buprenorphine metabolite norbuprenorphine,[*] suggesting "that buprenorphine is rarely present in deaths attributed to drug overdose" (p. 2). Both cases testing positive for norbuprenorphine also tested positive for heroin metabolites and other substances. The authors note that "our findings show that buprenorphine was rare in overdose deaths in New York City, suggesting that while rates of diversion may be increasing, there is no evidence that the increase in diversion is leading to significant health consequences such as overdose" (p. 3).

Drugs Detected in Unintentional Fatal Drug Overdoses in NYC, June-October 2013
(n=98)



[+]Heroin toxicology as morphine and 6-monoacetylmorphine.

*Samples were tested for buprenorphine and its metabolite, norbuprenorphine, with reporting limits at 1 nanogram/milliliter.

NOTES: The deaths presented here represented only 31% of the 331 unintentional drug overdose deaths occurring between June 1 and October 31, 2013 due to the lag time in case finalization. This analysis only included overdose deaths in NYC, thus it may not be generalizable to overdose deaths in other locations. The toxicology results are not mutually exclusive and therefore will not add to 100%.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Paone, D., et. al., "Buprenorphine Infrequently Found in Fatal Overdose in New York City," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 2015. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2015.08.007. For more information, contact Denise Paone at dpaone@health.nyc.gov.

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