

# Methamphetamine Fatalities on the Rise in King County, Washington

(U) This DEA Bulletin is based on preliminary reporting and may be subject to updating as additional information becomes available.

DEA-SEA-BUL-187-17  
AUGUST 2017

## Event

The King County Medical Examiner's Office (KCMEO) reported that deaths caused by drugs increased to their highest levels in 2016 in King County, Washington. Methamphetamine was responsible for 109 (30 percent) of the 360 drug deaths according to KCMEO data. DEA reporting indicates that the methamphetamine responsible for the overdose deaths was produced in Mexico and smuggled across the Southwest Border (SWB) to the Pacific Northwest. Recently, methamphetamine users have begun combining the drug with heroin—a combination that has led to a substantial increase in deaths in King County—according to an analysis of KCMEO data.

## Significance

King County, which encompasses Seattle, has experienced a steady rise in the number of deaths caused by methamphetamine over the past five years. King County—Washington's most populous county—has experienced a five-fold increase in the number of deaths caused by methamphetamine abuse. Methamphetamine's share of all drug-caused deaths in King County is also rising. Before 2012, methamphetamine accounted for no more than 8 percent of the total overdose deaths in King County. But since 2011, methamphetamine-caused deaths have accounted for no less than 13 percent of the overall drug deaths. In 2016, methamphetamine caused 30 percent of the overall drug deaths in King County. Users are increasingly combining methamphetamine with heroin and deaths due to this combination increased substantially in 2016 (12 percent of the overall drug death total). Cocaine has been the stimulant causing the greatest number of drug overdose deaths for the last decade; however, that trend changed in 2015 when methamphetamine-caused deaths exceeded those from cocaine for the first time per KCMEO data.

Based on recent trends, the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) Seattle Field Division assesses that drug deaths caused by methamphetamine in King County will continue to increase due to this psychostimulant addiction as well as the use of the drug in combination with heroin.



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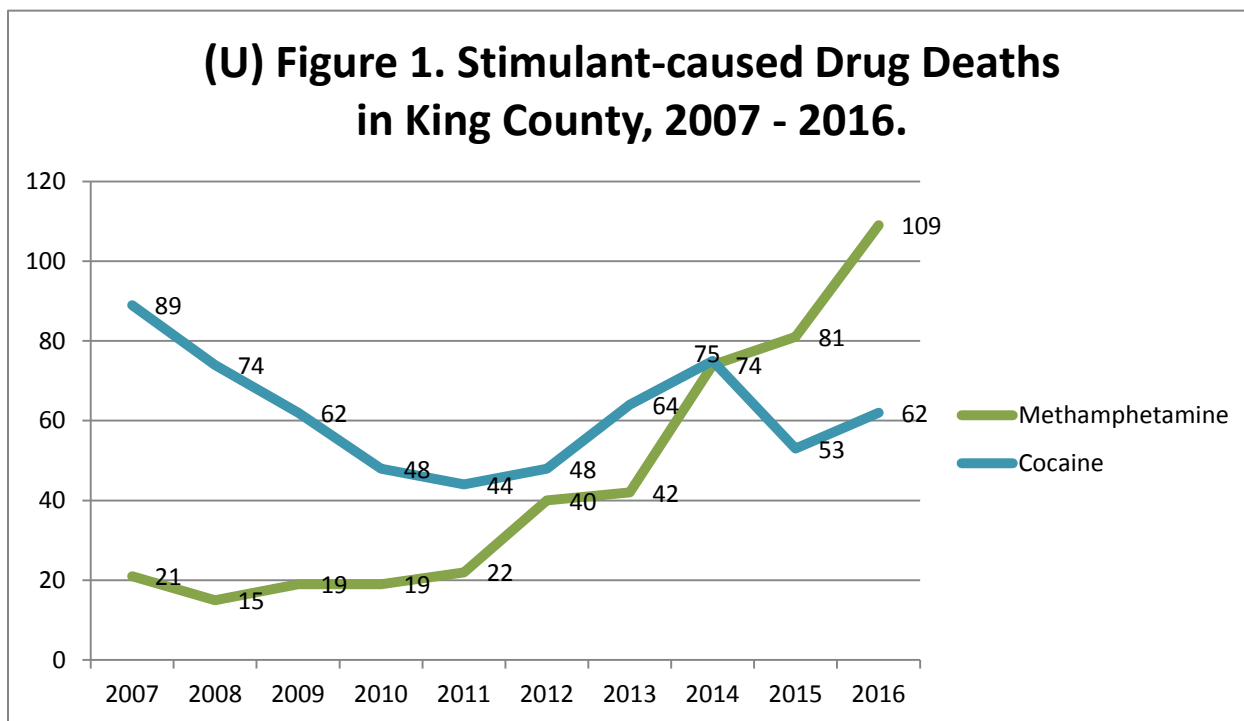


Seattle  
Field  
Division



## Details

Deaths caused from methamphetamine have increased 395 percent over the past 5 years after holding at an average of 19 deaths per year from 2007 to 2011 in King County. Figure 1 shows the deaths caused by the stimulants methamphetamine and cocaine for the past decade in King County.



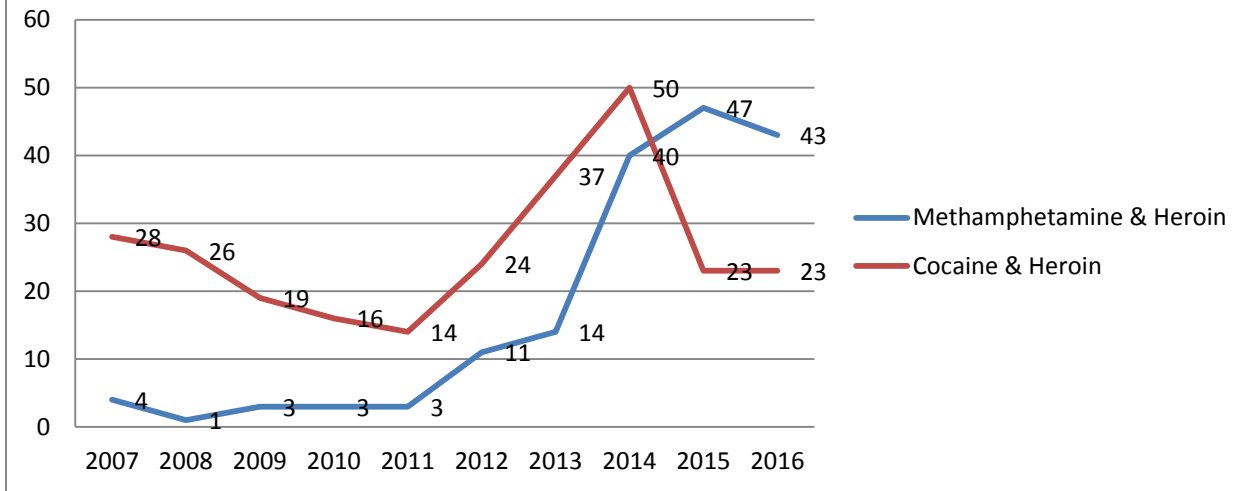
Source: King County Medical Examiner Office

Methamphetamine continues to increase as a drug of abuse in King County. Methamphetamine deaths surpassed cocaine deaths in 2015 and surpassed pharmaceutical opioid deaths in 2016 for the first time, making methamphetamine deaths second only to heroin.

As users are combining methamphetamine with heroin, deaths by this combination have increased significantly, reaching 12 percent of the overall drug death total in 2016. A decade ago, cocaine combined with heroin was the leading stimulant-opiate combination causing drug overdose deaths. That trend changed in 2015 when methamphetamine with heroin combination deaths exceeded cocaine and heroin for the first time in King County.

Preliminary data for the first quarter of 2017 shows that methamphetamine continues to be the second leading cause of drug deaths, accounting for 37 of the 89 drug deaths reported (42 percent). Also for the first quarter of 2017, 24 drug-caused deaths (27 percent) were from a combination of methamphetamine and heroin.

**(U) Figure 2. Deaths Caused by Stimulant with Heroin Combination in King County, 2007 - 2016.**



Source: King County Medical Examiner Office data

Methamphetamine was also a contributing factor in non-overdose deaths during 2016 in King County. In 2016, of the 1,413 deaths for which autopsies were performed, 11 percent tested positive for the presence of methamphetamine. Of the 84 total homicides in 2016, 25 percent were positive for methamphetamine. In addition, of the 95 traffic fatalities, methamphetamine was a causative factor in 16 percent of them. Of all 360 drug overdose deaths, 30 percent were positive for methamphetamine. In addition, methamphetamine is associated with a high rate of violence and property crime in King County.

The distribution of the 109 methamphetamine-related overdose deaths in 2016 by the city where the death occurred is shown in Figure 3.

(U) Figure 3. Methamphetamine-related Overdose Deaths by King County City, 2016.

City	Death Count	Population	Crude Rate*
<b>Auburn</b>	11	77,006	14.3
<b>Bellevue</b>	2	139,820	1.4
<b>Burien</b>	4	50,467	7.9
<b>Des Moines</b>	1	31,221	3.2
<b>Enumclaw</b>	2	11,609	17.2
<b>Fall City</b>	1	1,729	57.8
<b>Federal Way</b>	7	95,171	7.4
<b>Issaquah</b>	3	36,081	8.3
<b>Kent</b>	4	126,952	3.2
<b>Kirkland</b>	1	87,281	1.1
<b>Maple Valley</b>	2	25,686	7.8

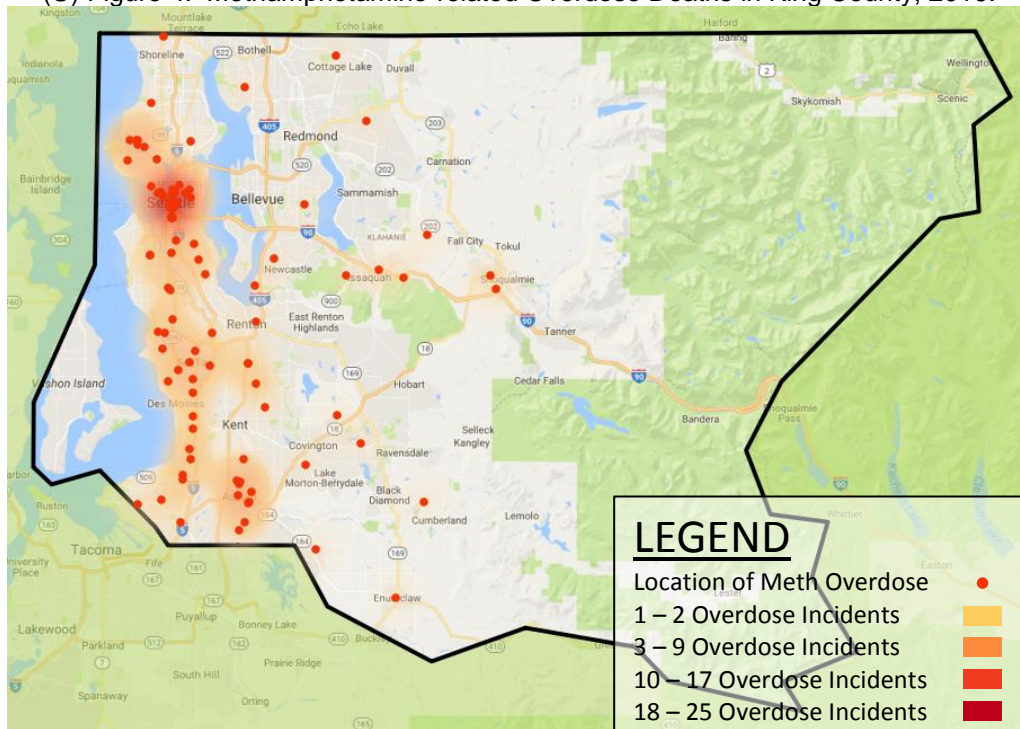
<b>Redmond</b>	1	60,598	1.7
<b>Renton</b>	4	100,242	4.0
<b>SeaTac</b>	5	28,215	17.7
<b>Seattle</b>	44	684,451	6.4
<b>Shoreline</b>	1	55,439	1.8
<b>Snoqualmie</b>	2	13,169	15.2
<b>Tukwila</b>	1	20,018	5.0
<b>Woodinville</b>	1	11,782	8.5
<b>King County</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>2,117,125</b>	<b>5.1</b>
<i>* per 100,000</i>			

Source: King County Medical Examiner Office data

More than two-thirds (69 percent) of the fatal methamphetamine overdose deaths last year in King County were men. The median age of the 109 people killed by the drug in the county was 44 years old.

Figure 4 shows hot spots for methamphetamine-caused deaths in King County. As stated previously, a total of 109 (30 percent) of all drug deaths in King County were caused by methamphetamine.

(U) Figure 4. Methamphetamine-related Overdose Deaths in King County, 2016.

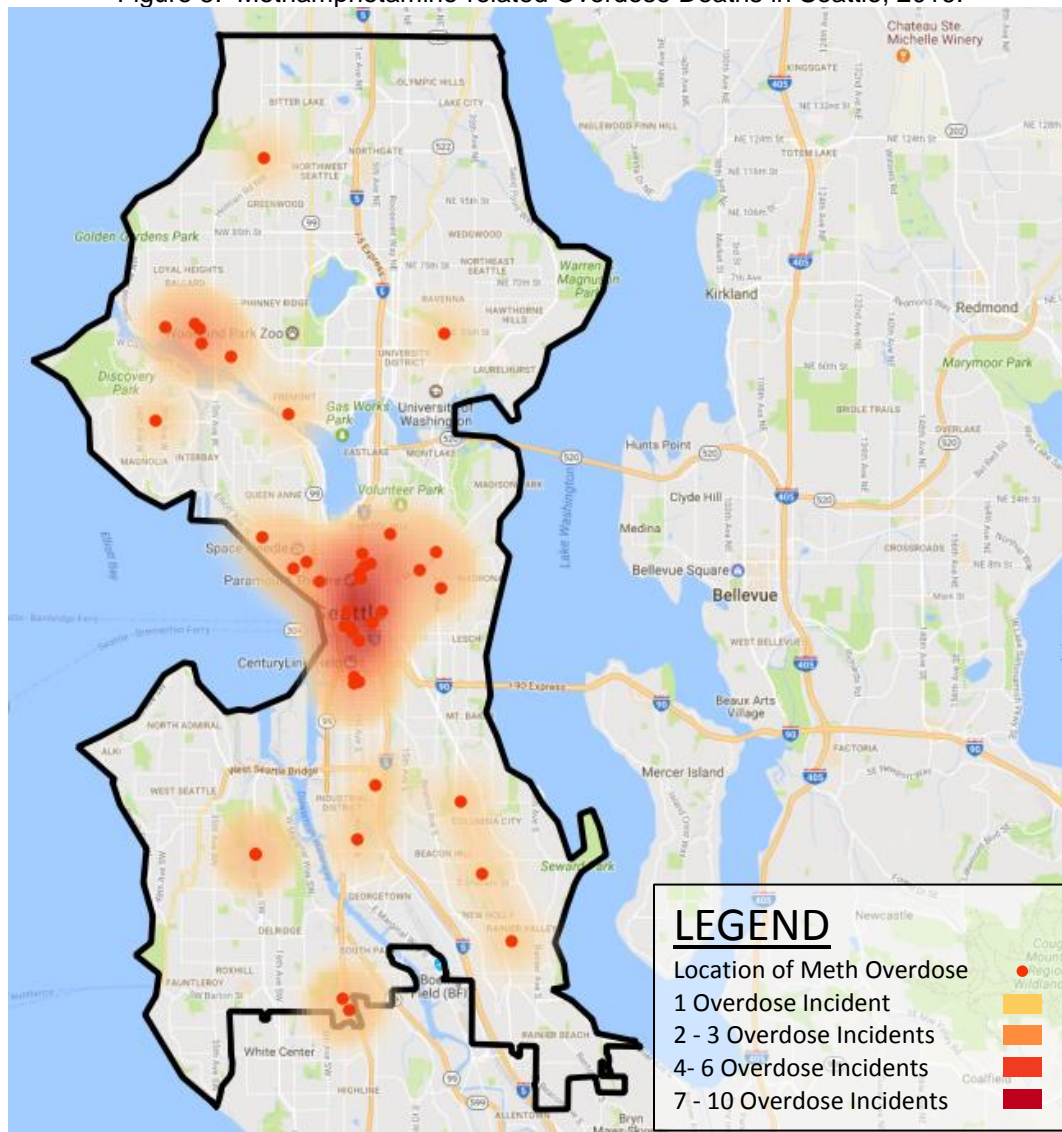


Source: King County Medical Examiner Office data

Figure 5 shows hot spots for methamphetamine-caused deaths in Seattle—a city in the Pacific Northwest and Washington State’s largest city. In 2016, 44 drug deaths in Seattle (25 percent) were caused by the psychostimulant methamphetamine. In 2016, 179 drug

deaths (50 percent) occurred within Seattle. Moreover, Seattle accounted for 40 percent of all methamphetamine deaths in King County. Seattle was distantly followed by the cities of Auburn with 11 deaths (10 percent) and Federal Way with 7 deaths (6 percent) caused by methamphetamine.

Figure 5. Methamphetamine-related Overdose Deaths in Seattle, 2016.



Source: King County Medical Examiner Office data

(U) This product was prepared by the DEA Seattle Field Division. Comments and questions may be addressed to the Chief, Analysis and Production Section at [dea.onsi@usdoj.gov](mailto:dea.onsi@usdoj.gov). For media/press inquiries call (202) 307-7977.