Before the COVID-19 pandemic, drug overdose death rates in Greater Cincinnati declined by 26% from 2017 to 2019. However, disruptions during the pandemic—such as temporary closures of syringe services programs and in-person treatment sessions—may have slowed progress to reduce overdose deaths.

Preliminary overdose death rates for 2020 varied across the region. Some counties saw an increase while others saw a decline. Nationally, more than 93,000 people died from drug overdoses in 2020, according to provisional data. That’s a 29.4% increase from 2019 and the highest number of annual overdose deaths ever recorded. The Greater Cincinnati COVID-19 Health Issues Survey asked Greater Cincinnati adults how the pandemic has affected their friends and family members’ substance use.

Naloxone available

Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, is a safe, effective medication used to temporarily reverse an opioid overdose. Policies have made it widely available in our region: by mail order in Ohio from Harm Reduction Ohio, in Indiana from ShipHappens, and in Kentucky from the Bracken County, Northern Kentucky and Three Rivers health departments.

8% reported that they had a friend or family member who experienced a drug overdose since the start of the pandemic.

8% reported that they had a friend or family member who experienced problems as a result of relapsing and using drugs again.

Interact for Health asked these questions to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on overdose and substance use in our region. This is the first time Interact for Health has asked questions about overdose and relapse in our region.