

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Health Department Releases Quarterly Drug Intoxication Report;  
Substantial Declines Found Through First Three Quarters of 2008**

Baltimore, MD (February 10, 2009) – The Health Department is releasing a quarterly report on intoxication deaths associated with drugs of abuse or alcohol. The report covers the first three quarters of calendar year 2008 and finds substantial declines in overdose deaths in the city.

Highlights of the report include:

- During the third quarter of 2008, the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner recorded 33 intoxication deaths associated with drugs of abuse or alcohol among Baltimore City residents and 39 deaths resulting from drug of abuse- or alcohol-associated intoxications that occurred in Baltimore City regardless of residence.
- These totals represent a 50% decrease compared to the third quarter of 2007.
- Overall, intoxication deaths associated with drugs of abuse or alcohol were 34% lower during the first three quarters of 2008 than in the same period in 2007. From January to September 2008, there were 113 deaths among residents, compared to 170 in the same period in 2007; and there were 134 deaths resulting from intoxications occurring in Baltimore, compared to 202 in 2007.
- While intoxication deaths associated with drugs of abuse decreased by 34% comparing the first three quarters of 2008 to the same period in 2007, deaths associated with alcohol only decreased by 6%. Among drug of abuse-associated deaths occurring in Baltimore, deaths associated with heroin decreased 39%, deaths associated with cocaine 42%, and deaths associated with methadone 38%.

“These are the lowest numbers of drug overdose deaths in the city since at least 1995, the last year for which we have complete data,” said Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner of Health. “Baltimore is making progress against this major public health problem.”

A variety of efforts are underway in the city that could be contributing to the decline in overdoses. These efforts include the expansion of substance abuse treatment with

buprenorphine, increased access to drug treatment within the criminal justice system, communication with physicians on appropriate prescribing of opiates drugs, and efforts to educate intravenous drug users and their friends and family on how to avoid overdose. The extent to which these or other factors are responsible for the declines in intoxication deaths is not known.

The Health Department's Office of Epidemiology and Planning, under the leadership of Dr. Caroline Fichtenberg, authored the report using data from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of the State of Maryland.

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