

## How big is the problem of heroin overdoses?

Not only are people using heroin, they are also abusing multiple other substances, especially cocaine and prescription opioid pain relievers. Nearly all people who use heroin also use at least 1 other drug.

As heroin use has increased, so have heroin related overdose deaths. Between 2000 and 2015, the rate of heroin-related overdose deaths more than quadrupled, and more than 12,989 people died in 2015.



## What is fentanyl?

Pharmaceutical fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever, approved for treating severe pain, typically advanced cancer pain. **It is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.**

It is prescribed in the form of transdermal patches or lozenges and can be diverted for misuse and abuse in the United States. In most recent cases of fentanyl related harm, overdose, and death in the U.S. are linked to illegally made fentanyl. It is often mixed with heroin and/or cocaine as a combination product with or without the user's knowledge to increase its euphoric effects.

## Did you know?

**Good Samaritan Laws exist in many states. In the event of an overdose, these policies protect the victim and the person seeking medical help for the victim from drug possession charges.**

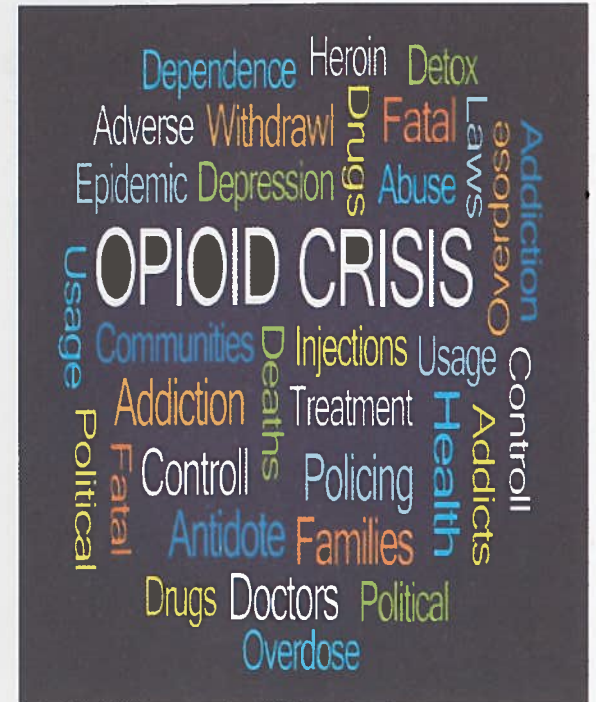
**DIAL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY every second counts.**

Content source:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention U. S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, DEA Investigative Reporting, January 2015. Dr. Carlos Tirado, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Austin.



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## OPIOID OVERDOSES THE EPIDEMIC



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## Drug overdose deaths in the United States continue to increase in 2015



**91**  
AMERICANS

die every day from an **opioid overdose** (that includes prescription opioids and heroin).

Drug overdose deaths and opioid-involved deaths continue to increase in the United States. The majority of drug overdose deaths (more than six out of ten) involve an opioid. Since 1999, the number of overdose deaths involving opioids (including prescription Opioids and Heroin) quadrupled. From 2000 to 2015 more than half a million-people died from drug overdoses. **91 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.**

We now know that overdoses from prescription opioids are a driving factor in the 15-year increase in opi-

oid overdose deaths. Since 1999, the amount of deaths from prescription opioid drugs like oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone have more than quadrupled in the U.S. yet there has not been an overall change in the amount of pain that Americans report.

### Addiction and Overdose

Anyone who takes prescription opioids can become addicted to them. In fact, as many as one in four patients receiving long-term opioid therapy in a primary care setting struggles with opioid addiction. Once addicted, it can be hard to stop. In 2014, nearly two million Americans either abused or were dependent on prescription opioid pain relievers. Taking too many prescription opioids can stop a person's breathing leading to death.

Prescription opioid overdose deaths also often involve benzodiazepines. Benzodiazepines are central nervous system depressants used to sedate, induce sleep, prevent seizures, and relieve anxiety. Examples include alprazolam (Xanax®), diazepam (Valium®), and lorazepam (Ativan®). Avoid taking benzodiazepines while taking prescription opioids whenever possible.

The good news is that opioid dependence can be effectively treated - but part of the problem is recognizing the signs that someone you love is abusing the drugs in the first place.

### Five signs a loved one is abusing painkillers:

1. Drowsiness, lack of energy
2. Inability to concentrate, lack of motivation
3. Social behavioral changes
4. Changes in appearance
5. Increased secrecy

If you or someone you know is dependent on prescription painkillers, you are not alone.

Visit **The Partnership at Drugfree.org** for resources on where to find help.

Since 2010, heroin overdose death rates have more than **quadrupled.**

