

FAQ on opioid abuse in the U.S.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention released guidelines March 18, 2016 for primary care physicians who prescribe opioids for chronic pain not related to active cancer treatment, palliative care, or end-of-life care. The guidelines are meant to reduce the number of opioid-addicted residents in the U.S., and to combat a rising number of overdose deaths due to prescription opioids.

This FAQ addresses the main points of what the Department of Health & Human services has described as an opioid epidemic in the U.S.

[“Opioid abuse is a serious public health issue.](#) Drug overdose deaths are the leading cause of injury death in the United States.”¹

“More people died from drug overdoses in 2014 than in any year on record. The majority of drug overdose deaths (more than six out of ten) involve an opioid. And since 1999, the rate of overdose deaths involving opioids (including [prescription opioid pain relievers](#) and [heroin](#)) nearly quadrupled.”²

From 2000 to 2014 nearly half a million people died from drug overdoses. 78 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.”

“[An estimated 20% of patients presenting](#) to physician offices with noncancer pain symptoms or pain-related diagnoses (including acute and chronic pain) receive an opioid prescription.”³

“[\[A\]nalysis of data from the 2012 National Health Interview Study](#) showed that 11.2% of adults report having daily pain.” [Note that the current prescription rate for ‘pain-related opioids is nearly double the rate of reported pain, relative to this study.]⁴

“[\[B\]etween 26.4 million and 36 million people abuse opioids worldwide,](#) with an estimated 2.1 million people in the United States suffering from substance use disorders related to prescription opioid pain relievers in 2012 and an estimated 467,000 addicted to heroin.”⁵

“Of the 21.5 million Americans 12 or older that had a substance use disorder in 2014, 1.9 million had a substance use disorder involving prescription pain relievers and 586,000 had a substance use disorder involving heroin. It is estimated that 23% of individuals who use heroin develop opioid addiction.”⁶

Sources

1. [About the epidemic](#), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.
2. [Drug overdose deaths in the United States hit record numbers in 2014](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Injury Center.
3. [CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain](#) — United States, 2016. Released March 18, 2016.
4. [NIH analysis shows Americans are in pain](#), National Institutes of Health.
5. [Testimony before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control](#), May 14, 2014 by Nora D. Volkow, M.D., director of the National Institute in Drug Abuse.
6. [Opioid addiction: 2016 Facts & Figures](#), American Society of Addiction Medicine.

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