

# FACT SHEET



## PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

In 2013, a total of 43,982 deaths in the United States were attributed to drug poisoning, including 16,235 deaths (37 percent) involving opioid analgesics. From 1999 to 2013, the drug poisoning death rate more than doubled from 6.1 to 13.8 per 100,000 population, and the rate for drug poisoning deaths involving opioid analgesics nearly quadrupled from 1.4 to 5.1 per 100,000.<sup>i</sup>

In 2013, of the 43,982 drug overdose deaths in the United States, 22,767 (51.8 percent) were related to pharmaceuticals.<sup>ii</sup>

More people die from overdose of prescription drugs than they do from heroin and cocaine combined.<sup>iii</sup>

Of the 22,767 deaths relating to pharmaceutical overdose in 2013, 16,235 (71.3 percent) involved opioid analgesics (also called opioid pain relievers or prescription painkillers), and 6,973 (30.6 percent) involved benzodiazepines. (Some deaths include more than one type of drug.)<sup>iv</sup>

In 2011 and 2012, poisoning was the leading cause of unintentional injury death in the United States<sup>v,vi</sup>, and nine out of 10 poisoning deaths are caused by drug poisoning<sup>vii</sup>. For years before that, the leading cause of unintentional injury death was car accidents.

In 2011, drug misuse and abuse caused about 2.5 million emergency department (ED) visits. Of these, more than 1.4 million ED visits were related to the nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals. Among those ED visits, 501,207 visits were related to anti-anxiety and insomnia medications, and 420,040 visits were related to opioid analgesics.<sup>viii</sup>

Among children under age 6, pharmaceuticals account for about 40 percent of all exposures reported to poison centers.<sup>ix</sup>

The Office of National Drug Control Policy's 2011 Prescription Drug Abuse Plan includes "proper medication disposal" as one of four major action areas to reduce prescription drug abuse.<sup>x</sup>

According to the Monitoring the Future Study, which is the largest survey of drug use among young people, prescription drugs are the second-most abused category of drugs after marijuana.<sup>xi</sup>

The latest National Survey on Drug Use and Health shows that more than 70 percent of people who abused prescription pain relievers got them from friends or relatives.<sup>xii</sup>

In the United States, prescription opioid abuse costs were about \$55.7 billion in 2007. Of this amount, 46 percent was attributable to workplace costs (e.g., lost productivity), 45 percent to healthcare costs (e.g., abuse treatment), and 9 percent to criminal justice costs.<sup>xiii</sup>

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## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

As of 2009, there were more than 1,000 published reports of the occurrence of pharmaceuticals in sewage, surface waters, ground waters and elsewhere.<sup>xiv</sup>

Because of these findings, most federal, state and local authorities are now recommending (and many requiring) that pharmaceuticals not be disposed in the toilet or sink.

<sup>i</sup> QuickStats: Rates\* of Deaths from Drug Poisoning<sup>†</sup> and Drug Poisoning Involving Opioid Analgesics<sup>§</sup>— United States, 1999–2013, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6401a10.htm>.

<sup>ii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Vital Statistics System mortality data. (2015) Available from URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/deaths.htm>.

<sup>iii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vital Signs: Overdoses of Prescription Opioid Pain Relievers—United States, 1999–2008. MMWR 2011; 60: 1-6.

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Vital Statistics System mortality data. (2015) Available from URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/deaths.htm>.

<sup>v</sup> 10 Leading Causes of Injury Deaths by Age Group Highlighting Unintentional Injury Deaths, United States – 2011, National Center for Health Statistics, (NCHS), National Vital Statistics System, [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading\\_causes\\_of\\_injury\\_deaths\\_highlighting\\_unintentional\\_injury\\_2011-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading_causes_of_injury_deaths_highlighting_unintentional_injury_2011-a.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> 10 Leading Causes of Injury Deaths by Age Group Highlighting Unintentional Injury Deaths, United States – 2012, National Center for Health Statistics, (NCHS), National Vital Statistics System, [http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading\\_causes\\_of\\_injury\\_deaths\\_highlighting\\_unintentional\\_injury\\_2012-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading_causes_of_injury_deaths_highlighting_unintentional_injury_2012-a.pdf).

<sup>vii</sup> Drug Poisoning Deaths in the United States, 1980–2008, NCHS Data Brief, No. 81, Dec. 2011, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db81.pdf>.

<sup>viii</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Highlights of the 2011 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) findings on drug-related emergency department visits. The DAWN Report. Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; 2013. Available from URL: <http://archive.samhsa.gov/data/2k13/DAWN127/sr127-DAWN-highlights.htm>.

<sup>ix</sup> Mowry JB, Spyker DA, Cantilena LR, Bailey JEFord M. 2012 Annual report of the American Association of Poison Control Centers' National Poison Data System (NPDS): 30th annual report. Clin Tox 2013;51:949-1229.

<sup>x</sup> Epidemic: Responding to America's Prescription Drug Abuse Crisis, Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2011, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/ondcp/policy-and-research/rx\\_abuse\\_plan.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/ondcp/policy-and-research/rx_abuse_plan.pdf).

<sup>xi</sup> Monitoring the Future Survey, Overview of Findings 2014, National Institute on Drug Abuse, <http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/monitoring-future/monitoring-future-survey-overview-findings-2014>.

<sup>xii</sup> National Survey Shows Friends and Family Are Primary Sources of Abused Painkillers, Office of National Drug Control Policy, April 25, 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/news-releases-remarks/national-survey-shows-friends-and-family-are-primary-sources-of-abused-painkillers>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Birnbaum HG, White AG, Schiller M, Waldman T, Cleveland JM, and Roland CL. Societal costs of prescription opioid abuse, dependence, and misuse in the United States. Pain Medicine 2011; 12: 657-667.

<sup>xiv</sup> Daughton CG and Ruhoy IS. 2009. Environmental footprint of pharmaceuticals: the significance of factors beyond direct excretion to sewers. Envir Tox and Chem 28(12):2495-2521.

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