

[HOME](#) > [HEALTH_NEWS](#) > PAINKILLERS, HEROIN HELP DRIVE RISE IN DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS

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Painkillers, heroin help drive rise in drug overdose deaths



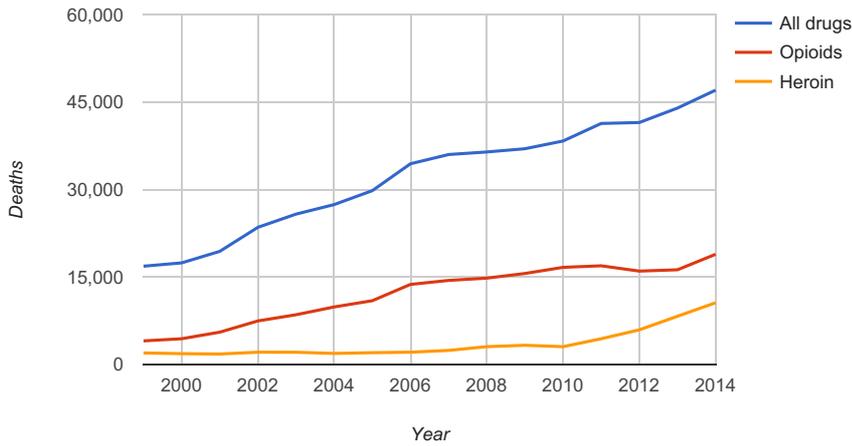
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Drug overdose deaths continued rising in 2014, and painkillers and heroin played a big role in that increase, according to [The Associated Press](#) and [data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC).

Overdose deaths hit 47,055 last year, a 7 percent rise over the previous year.

Painkillers and heroin contributed to close to two-thirds of those deaths. [Opioid analgesics](#), which are prescription painkillers like oxycodone and hydrocodone, were behind nearly 19,000 deaths, up 16 percent from the previous year. Heroin caused more than 10,500 deaths, up 28 percent from 2013.

Drug poisoning deaths



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality File

The CDC still needs to analyze the data, which came from death certificates, to figure out why drug overdose deaths are rising. However, officials believe illegally manufactured fentanyl, which the [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) describes as a synthetic but more powerful version of morphine, could be playing a role, the AP reported.

Some people who abused painkillers have turned to heroin since 2010, since heroin has become cheaper and easier to get than pills. More recently, drug dealers have started lacing heroin with fentanyl to make it more potent, [The Washington Post](#) explained.

CDC director Tom Frieden told [The Washington Post](#) the latest data could change a bit – some people may have been counted twice, since the agency still needs to determine how many people died with both painkillers and heroin in their systems.

“The bottom line is the opioid overdose epidemic has not abated and appears to have soared in 2014,” Frieden said to the Post. “It’s clear that we need to do more.”

There’s been a big focus on opioid abuse the past few years. Health groups, law enforcement and public agencies have tried to get the drug overdose-reversing drug naloxone widely distributed, sent users to rehabilitation instead of jail when possible, urged doctors to limit prescriptions for opioid painkillers and focused on drug trafficking, according to the AP and [Washington Post](#). In October, [President Barack Obama](#) announced steps his administration is taking to combat drug abuse.

And on Monday, the the Food and Drug Administration started taking public comments on proposed new painkiller prescribing guidelines, [The Washington Post](#) reported in a different article.

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