

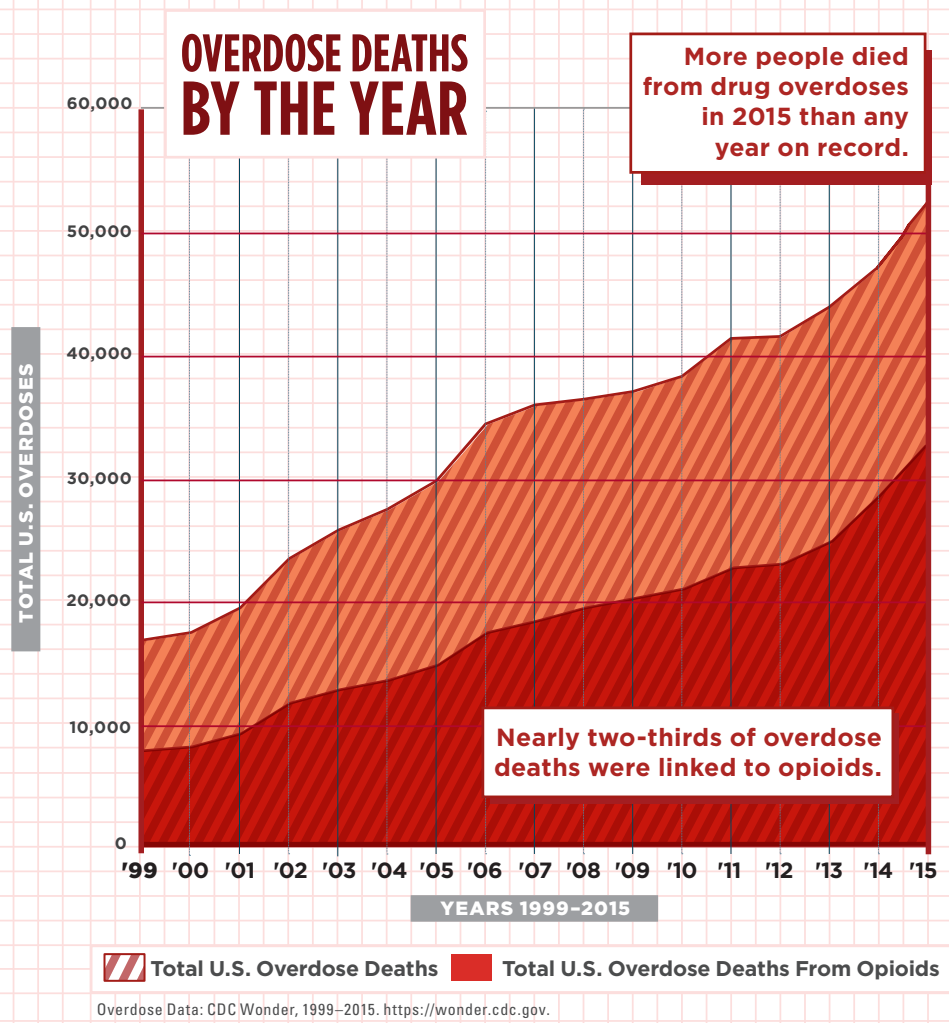
# OPIOIDS AND THE OVERDOSE EPIDEMIC

**America is facing a national health crisis. More people died from drug overdoses in 2015 than any other year on record. In fact, more people died from drug overdoses than from either car crashes or guns. Nearly two-thirds of overdose deaths were linked to opioids.**

Opioids (*OH-pee-oyds*) are a group of chemicals that reduce pain, increase pleasure, and slow breathing. Prescription opioid medications include OxyContin® (oxycodone), Vicodin® (hydrocodone), codeine, morphine, methadone, and fentanyl. Heroin is also an opioid, but it is illegal.

Doctors prescribe opioids to treat severe pain. But these drugs, like heroin, can be addictive and potentially deadly due to overdoses. Opioid overdoses cause breathing to slow or even stop. Without medical help, this can cause death.

In recent years, overdoses and deaths related to opioids have dramatically increased. Health officials call it an *epidemic* because the number of overdoses has increased dramatically throughout the population. Read on to learn more about the crisis and how to stay safe.

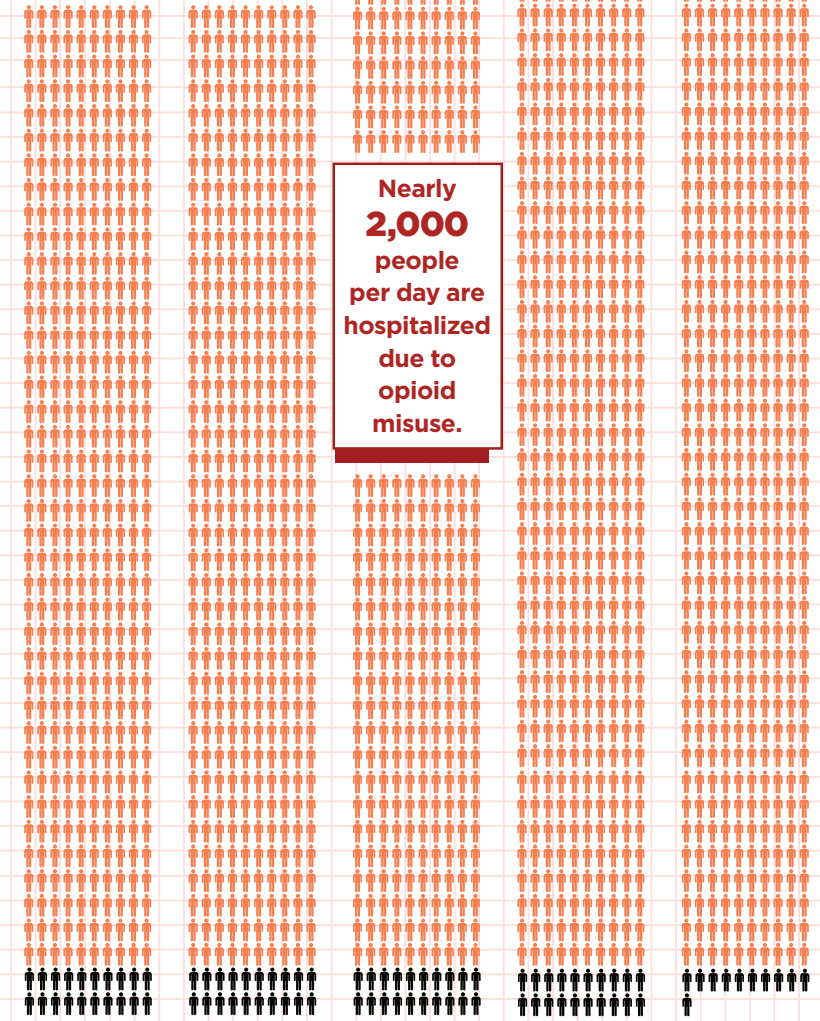


## SAFETY TIPS

**When opioids are prescribed by a doctor and used as directed, most people don't become addicted, overdose, or die—but some do. Opioids are very powerful painkillers that should be handled with extreme care. The following safety precautions are very important.**

- ✓ Never take any drug not directly supplied by a doctor or a pharmacy. Prescription painkillers that are made or sold illegally can be deadly.
- ✓ If a doctor prescribes an opioid painkiller, discuss with him or her whether there are less addictive options.
- ✓ Medications should be taken exactly as prescribed.
- ✓ Opioids should never be mixed with alcohol or with any other drug (except as prescribed by a doctor) because this greatly increases the risk of overdose.
- ✓ Prescription drugs should never be shared with anyone else. This is both illegal and dangerous.

## OPIOID MISUSE BY THE DAY



## WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

- ↑ **An increase in prescriptions:** Between 1999 and 2013, the number of opioid prescriptions in the United States quadrupled. New guidelines are now helping decrease the number of prescriptions.
- ↑ **A rise in heroin use:** People addicted to prescription opioids sometimes end up using heroin, which is cheaper. As a result, the use of heroin has been increasing across most age groups and populations. Heroin today is much more pure and powerful than it was 30 years ago—which increases the risk of overdose.



## + A LIFESAVING DRUG

**Naloxone** is a medication that can reverse opioid overdose and restore breathing. It can save a victim's life if administered quickly enough. Naloxone is used by medical personnel, but programs are underway to also make it available to opioid users, their friends, and other potential bystanders.

► **More Info:** For additional facts about opioids and health, visit [scholastic.com/headsup](http://scholastic.com/headsup) and [teens.drugabuse.gov](http://teens.drugabuse.gov).