America is facing a health crisis. More people died from drug overdoses in 2015 than in any other year on record. Nearly two-thirds of overdose deaths were linked to opioids.

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

Doctors prescribe opioids to treat severe pain. But these drugs can be deadly because of overdoses. Opioid overdoses cause breathing to slow or even stop. Without medical help, this can cause death.

Health officials say that we now have an opioid overdose epidemic. That’s because the number of overdoses has increased dramatically across the country. Read on to learn more.

Opioids are very powerful painkillers. They should only be taken as prescribed by a doctor. The following safety precautions are very important.

- Only take prescription drugs supplied by a doctor or a pharmacy.
- If a doctor prescribes an opioid painkiller, ask if there are safer options.
- Medications should be taken exactly as prescribed.
- Opioids should never be mixed with alcohol or with...
OPIOID MISUSE BY THE DAY

Nearly 2,000 people per day are hospitalized due to opioid misuse.

Roughly 91 people die every day from opioid overdose.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

An increase in prescriptions: Between 1999 and 2013, the number of opioid prescriptions in the United States quadrupled. New guidelines have helped to 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, heroin use has been increasing. Heroin today is much more pure and powerful than it was 30 years ago. This increases the risk of overdose.

A rise in fentanyl deaths: Fentanyl is an opioid that is 50 to 100 times more powerful than other opioids. This increases the risk of overdose. Normally, fentanyl is prescribed only for extreme pain. But now it is being illegally made and is sometimes mixed with heroin and other drugs. People have died by taking this powerful drug without knowing it.

A LIFESAVING DRUG

Naloxone is a lifesaving medication. It can reverse opioid overdose and restore breathing. It can save a victim’s life if administered quickly enough. Naloxone can be used by medical professionals and ordinary people.

More Info: For additional facts about opioids and health, visit scholastic.com/headsup and teens.drugabuse.gov.

Safety Tips (continued)

any other drug (except as prescribed by a doctor). This increases the risk of overdose.

✓ Prescription drugs should never be shared with anyone else. This is both illegal and possibly dangerous.