

HEADS UP
REAL NEWS ABOUT DRUGS AND YOUR BODY

OPIOIDS AND THE OVERDOSE EPIDEMIC

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

Opioids (Oxycodone) are a group of chemicals that reduce pain, increase pleasure, and slow breathing. Prescription opioid medications include Oxycodone (OxyContin), Vicodin®, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, and fentanyl. Heroin is also an opioid. So is the illegal drug.

Doctors prescribe opioids to treat severe pain. But these drugs, too, 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 have been related to opioids have multiplied. The number of overdoses has increased dramatically throughout the country. Read on to learn more about the crisis and how to stay safe.

SAFETY TIPS

- Never take any drug that a doctor prescribed for someone else or a pharmacy. Prescription guidelines 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.

Legend: Total U.S. Overdose Deaths (2000-2015) Total U.S. Overdose Deaths From Opioids (2000-2015)

OPIOIDS AND THE OVERDOSE EPIDEMIC National Institute on Drug Abuse

America is facing a serious health crisis involving opioid drugs. On average, 3,900 people begin using prescription opioid painkillers for nonmedical use every day, greatly increasing each person's risk for addiction and overdose. Deaths involving opioid overdoses have more than quadrupled since 1999. The article "Opioids and the Overdose Epidemic" helps to show the extent of the crisis as well as what is causing it. The article also explains that while prescription opioid pain medications can play an important role in a person's medical care, they need to be used with extreme care. Included is advice on how students can keep themselves and loved ones safe.

SUBJECT

- Science Literacy
- English Language Arts
- Health/Life Skills

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- RST.6-8.1 and RST.9-10.1
- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts.

- RST.6-8.7 and RST.9-10.7
- Evaluate content presented in diverse formats, including visually and quantitatively.

NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

- MS-LS1-3 and HS-LS1-2
- From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes

NATIONAL SCIENCE EDUCATION STANDARDS

- Structure and Function in Living Things
- Personal and Community Health

Additional Teaching Resources:

- headsup.scholastic.com/teachers
- teens.drugabuse.gov

Critical-Thinking Questions:

- 1) An epidemic occurs when a disease or health-related event or behavior happens in a community at far greater rates than would normally be expected. What evidence indicates that the United States is facing an opioid overdose epidemic? *(Answers may include that more people died from drug overdoses in 2015 than any other year on record; heroin use and overdoses have increased across many age groups and populations; the number of people dying from opioid drugs today is more than four times the number who died in 1999.)*
- 2) What are some ways to help control the opioid overdose epidemic? Support your answer with textual evidence. *(Answers may include to improve how opioid medications are prescribed and dispensed so that only people who really need the drugs get them; carefully monitor those who receive prescriptions; make medications such as naloxone readily available so that if a person overdoses, he or she can quickly get lifesaving help; increase education about opioids so people better understand the risks.)*
- 3) Nearly all people who use heroin also use at least one other drug. What impact can that have on overdose rates? *(It may lead to higher overdose rates because mixing opioids with other drugs increases the risk for overdose.)*
- 4) What are at least three pieces of advice that can help people stay safe if they are prescribed opioid pain medications? *(Answers may include to talk with their doctor to make sure that there are no other safe alternatives; take the medications only as prescribed; seek help if they begin taking opioids for nonmedical reasons; never combine opioids with alcohol or other drugs; don't share prescriptions with other people; only take medications supplied by a doctor or pharmacy.)*

Writing Prompts:

- **Grades 6-8:** What are three ways people can misuse prescription opioid pain medications? What are some possible consequences of this?
- **Grades 9-10:** Explain at least three factors that may have led to an increase in the number of opioid overdoses in America.
- **Grades 11-12:** Why do you think heroin use is increasing among many different populations in America? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Tiered Vocabulary Tools:

Visit scholastic.com/headsup/opioidepidemic-vocabulary for a tiered vocabulary list to support this article.

Student Work Sheet:

The skills work sheet on the reverse side has students analyze graphs and combine the information with what they learned in the article to answer critical-thinking questions.

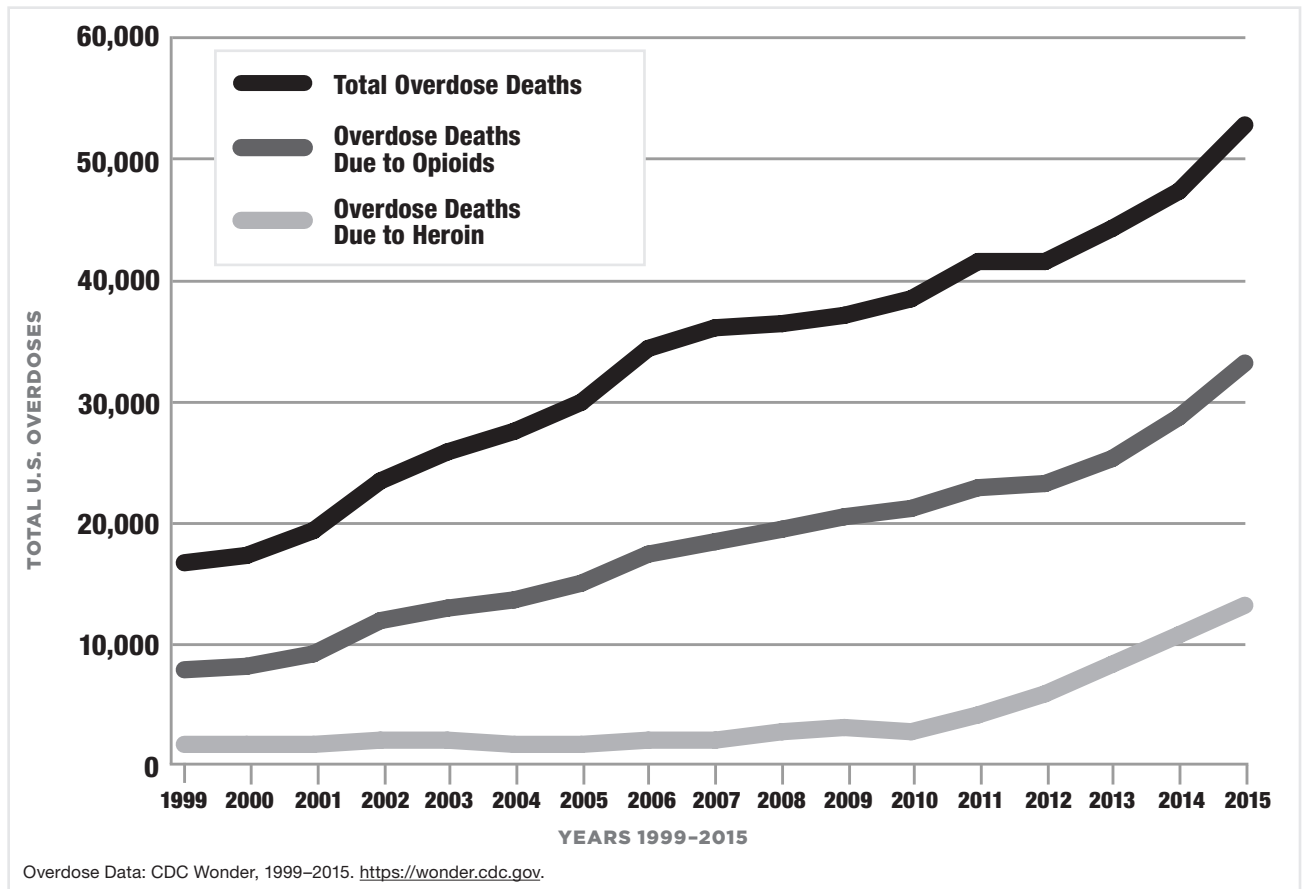
Answer Key: 1. The graph also includes the number of heroin overdose deaths from 1999–2015. 2. Roughly 40%. 3. Answers may include that more people have started using heroin over time and that heroin potency has increased, making overdoses more likely. 4. The increase in the number of drug overdose deaths due to opioids is more than half the total number of drug overdose deaths. 5. Answers may include that the number of opioid prescriptions has increased, and with more people using the drugs there is more chance of abuse; some people who become addicted to opioid painkillers are turning to heroin, which is cheaper and often easier to obtain than prescription opioids; there has been an increase in the production and use of illegal fentanyl—a very powerful opioid that can cause overdoses. 6. Answers may vary but should include the evidence that naloxone can prevent death in opioid overdose if it is given soon enough. If ordinary people have access to it, they may be able to get it to an overdose victim quickly and save the person's life.

[Continue to work sheet on next page.]

Opioids in America: Alarming Trends

Statistics show that opioid overdose is a public health emergency in America. In 2015, 3.8 million Americans reported that they had misused prescription painkillers in the last month. The use of heroin has also increased dramatically in recent years. Abusing these powerful drugs greatly increases a person's risk for overdose. Complete the activity below to analyze statistics of the opioid crisis.

Directions: Study the graph below, which has been modified from the graph shown in the article "Opioids and the Overdose Epidemic." Then, use the information in both graphs and the article to answer the questions that follow.



- How is the graph above different from the graph shown in the article?
- According to the graph, roughly what percentage of the opioid overdose deaths in 2015 were due to heroin?
- What are two possible factors that may have impacted the change in heroin overdose deaths over time?
- What evidence is there that the recent increase in drug overdoses is due mainly to opioids?
- What are three possible reasons that the number of drug overdoses related to opioids has increased in recent years? Use evidence from the graphs and the article to support your answer.
- Drugs that can reverse the overdose effects of opioids, such as naloxone, are normally given only by medical personnel. Do you think these medications, as well as training to administer them, should be readily available to all people? Explain your answer.