

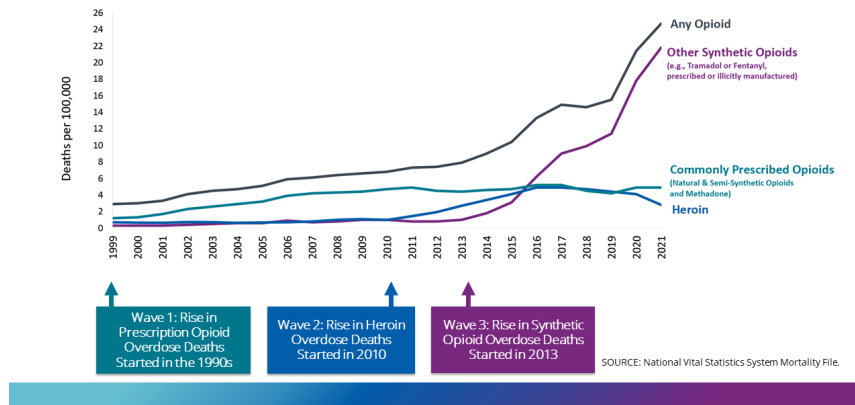
Understanding the Opioid Overdose Epidemic

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/epidemic.html> January 2024

The number of people who died from a drug overdose in 2021 was over six times the number in 1999. The number of drug overdose deaths increased more than 16% from 2020 to 2021. Over 75% of the nearly 107,000 drug overdose deaths in 2021 involved an opioid. From 2020 to 2021:

- Opioid-involved death rates increased by over 15%.
- Prescription opioid-involved death rates remained the same.
- Heroin-involved death rates decreased nearly 32%.
- Synthetic opioid-involved death rates (excluding methadone) increased over 22%.

Three Waves of Opioid Overdose Deaths



From 1999-2021, nearly 645,000 people died from an overdose involving any opioid, including prescription and illicit opioids.

This rise in opioid overdose deaths can be outlined in three distinct waves.

1. The first wave began with increased prescribing of opioids in the 1990s, with overdose deaths involving prescription opioids (natural and semi-synthetic opioids and methadone) increasing since at least 1999.
2. The second wave began in 2010, with rapid increases in overdose deaths involving heroin.
3. The third wave began in 2013, with significant increases in overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids, particularly those involving illicitly manufactured fentanyl. The market for illicitly manufactured fentanyl continues to change, and it can be found in combination with heroin, counterfeit pills, and cocaine.

Many opioid-involved overdose deaths also include other drugs.

Combating the Opioid Overdose Epidemic



CDC is committed to fighting the opioid overdose epidemic and supporting states and communities as they continue work to identify outbreaks, collect data, respond to overdoses, and provide care to those in their communities.

CDC's work focuses on:

- **Monitoring trends** to better understand and respond to the epidemic.
- **Advancing research** by collecting and analyzing data on opioid-related overdoses and improving data quality to better identify areas that need assistance and to evaluate prevention efforts.
- **Building state, local and tribal capacity** by equipping states with resources, improving data collection, and supporting use of evidence-based strategies. Overdose Data to Action (OD2A) is a cooperative agreement that aims to increase the timeliness and comprehensives of data and to use those data to inform public health response and prevention activities.
- **Supporting providers, healthcare systems, and payers** with data, tools, and guidance for evidence-based decision-making to improve opioid prescribing and patient safety.
- **Partnering with public safety officials and community organizations**, including law enforcement, to address the growing illicit opioid problem.
- **Increasing public awareness** about prescription opioid misuse and overdose and to make safe choices about opioids.

Collaboration is essential for success in preventing opioid overdose deaths. Medical personnel, emergency departments, first responders, public safety officials, mental health and substance use treatment providers, community-based organizations, public health, and members of the community all bring awareness, resources, and expertise to address this complex and fast-moving epidemic. Together, we can better coordinate efforts to prevent opioid overdoses and deaths.