

Five Things to Know about the Opioid Epidemic

1. Americans are dying every day from overdosing on opioids

Opioids are drugs that act on the nervous system to relieve pain. Every day, 115 Americans die after overdosing on opioids.¹ The misuse of and addiction to opioids – including prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl – is a serious national public health crisis. In 2016, drug overdoses killed more than 64,000 people in the U.S., more than any year on record.

Opioid deaths in Ohio are increasing.

In the 12-month period from June 2016 to June 2017, there were 5,232 unintentional drug overdose deaths in Ohio, a 39% increase compared to the previous 12 months.² Almost all (86%) of the 2016 deaths were attributed to opioids, particularly fentanyl.³ Since 2004, the number of unintentional opioid overdose deaths increased more than 7 times from 429 to 3,495.³

2. Addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease

Drug addiction is considered a brain disease because drugs change the brain's structure and how it works.⁴ The first time a person uses drugs it's usually a choice they've made.

However, with continued use, a person's ability to exert self-control can become seriously impaired. Opioids are highly addictive.⁵ Addiction is the continued use of a drug despite negative consequences. When people become addicted, they can't stop using drugs even when they really want to. Drug addiction is a treatable disease. However, being a chronic disease means that relapsing at some point is not only possible, but likely.⁴

3. Collaboration among people and organizations will be key to tackling the opioid epidemic.

A range of collaborative efforts will be critical in addressing the opioid epidemic.⁵⁻⁷ These efforts include:

- Offering educational prevention programs in school and community settings. Ohio now requires opioid education in schools (House Bill 367).⁸
- Using prescription drug monitoring systems
- Carrying out programs that include giving naloxone (an overdose antidote drug) to opioid users and their family members
- Sending people with substance use disorders to a special court system
- Making it possible for more people to receive treatment
- Forming or becoming part of existing community coalitions

4. Everyone can make a difference. Some things you can start doing today:

- Store medications safely.
- Don't share prescription medications.
- Learn to recognize signs and symptoms of opioid abuse.
- Keep talking about the opioid epidemic and help break the stigma.
- Become involved in prevention efforts.

5. Speak up and act now – talk with someone if you, a family member, or a friend is facing an opioid use disorder.

Because of the highly addictive nature of opioid drugs, professional help is often needed. Use the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Locator (www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator) or call 1-800-662-HELP (4357) for treatment information. Families have found benefit in seeking help and support through organizations such as Nar-Anon, Families Anonymous, or local Families Against Narcotics (FAN) chapters. The available resources and groups will vary by community.



Signs someone might be using opioids:⁹

- Constricted pupils
- Needle marks on the skin (if injecting drugs)
- Runny nose or nose sores (if snorting drugs)
- Sweaty, clammy skin
- Moving slower than usual
- Slurred speech
- Unable to move in a coordinated way
- Lack of awareness or inattention to the people and things around them
- Being sedated or acting drowsy

Symptoms someone using opioids could experience:

- Feeling unusually happy or excited, or feeling “high”
- Problems with attention and memory
- Feeling sad or losing interest in activities one normally enjoys
- Less sensitive to pain
- Feeling hopeless
- Confusion
- Constipation

To learn more about the opioid epidemic, visit www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose

Ohio communities face ongoing mental health and substance use challenges. Trained educators from Ohio State University Extension can offer classes in Mental Health First Aid. Contact Jami Dellifield dellifield.2@osu.edu. For someone who needs immediate assistance, there is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Additional Resources:

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT):

www.samsha.gov/about-us/who-we-are/offices-centers/csat

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): www.drugabuse.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): www.samhsa.gov

Generation Rx: www.generationrx.org

Mental Health First Aid: www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org

Sources:

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