

THE NUMBERS BEHIND AMERICA'S HEROIN EPIDEMIC

A guide to the drug's spread and impact OCT. 30, 2015

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America's heroin epidemic represents a new phase in the war on drugs. As Katharine Q. Seelye reports, heroin deaths have surged mostly among whites in the suburbs and small towns. The parents of those who have overdosed have also successfully pushed for a more forgiving approach to addiction, a stark contrast from the response to crack cocaine in the 1980s and '90s.

39% Sharp Rise in Heroin-Related Deaths

Heroin-related deaths jumped 39 percent from 2012 to 2013, and the longer-term trends are equally disturbing: from 2002 to 2013, the rate of heroin-related overdose deaths nearly quadrupled, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

90% Of First-Time Heroin Users Are White

Researchers have found that prior to the 1980s, whites and nonwhites were equally represented among first-time heroin users. But that's changed as heroin use has expanded across other parts of the country.

Now, nearly 90 percent of the people who tried heroin for the first time in the past decade were white. And a growing number are middle-class or wealthy.

In a July report, the [CDC found](#) “significant increases in heroin use were found in groups with historically low rates of heroin use, including women and people with private insurance and higher incomes. The gaps between men and women, low and higher incomes, and people with Medicaid and private insurance have narrowed in the past decade.”

75% Of Heroin Addicts Used Prescription Opioids Before Turning to Heroin

Three out of four heroin addicts started out by using prescription drugs, according a recent survey, which is part of a growing body of evidence that many of today's heroin users are shifting from prescription pill addiction to heroin addiction.

The C.D.C. reports that 45 percent of people who used heroin between 2011 and 2013 were also addicted to prescription painkillers.

People who are dependent on prescription opioids are 40 times more likely to abuse or be dependent on heroin, according to the C.D.C.

325 Opioid-Related Deaths in New Hampshire Last Year

Opioid deaths were up 76 percent in New Hampshire in 2014, with 325 people dying from an opioid overdose, according to state figures. Emergency room visits from heroin have more than tripled since 2013 in New Hampshire as well.

In Massachusetts, opioid deaths rose 20 percent in 2014, and are up 63 percent over 2012, The Boston Globe reported, while Maine has seen heroin-related deaths surge as well. In Vermont, Gov. Peter Shumlin declared the state to be in a "full-blown heroin crisis" in his 2014 State of the State Message.

Nationally, deaths from heroin rose to 8,260 in 2013.

\$133million In Federal Funds Will Combat the Epidemic

In response to surging heroin use, President Obama traveled this month to West Virginia to discuss his \$133 million proposal to fight drug addiction – by expanding access for drug treatment and prevention programs.

Some law enforcement experts and African-American leaders have expressed frustration with the fact that there seems to be more tolerance and sensitivity for drugs once they move into white communities.

“This is not a new problem,” said Marc Mauer, executive director of the Sentencing Project, which examines racial issues in the criminal justice system. “Go back 100 years on race and the drug war. Look at marijuana in the 1930s. Marijuana was demonized and the popular image of it was that it was used in racy parts of town, where blacks or Mexican-Americans went. That was the perception. Then in the 1960s, millions of largely white, middle-class college students started consuming enormous quantities of marijuana and perceptions changed almost overnight.”

71 New Cases of H.I.V. Reported in Indiana

As heroin use has soared, a raft of new H.I.V. and hepatitis outbreaks have occurred this year in states like Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia. In March, the Indiana governor, Mike Pence, declared a state of emergency over the state's H.I.V. outbreak, with 71 cases reported between December and March in Scott County, north of Louisville, all of them linked to the use of intravenous drugs.

Hepatitis C cases have been increasing in Maine, Missouri and large areas of Appalachia.

50% Increase in Mexico's Opium Production Last Year

Officials in Mexico and the United States say Mexico's opium production rose an estimated 50 percent in 2014, thanks in part to "a voracious American appetite" for heroin. It is all part of a global surge.

As *The New York Times* reported in June, the United Nations' annual World Drug Report found that Afghanistan's poppy fields expanded by 36 percent from 2012 to 2013. Over all, global poppy cultivation hit its highest level since the 1930s, the United Nations report found, suggesting that today's heroin epidemic will continue.