



Drug Facts - Prescription Pain Medications (Opioids)

Did you know there were 762 drug overdose emergency department (ED) visits, and 44 deaths as a result of opioids overdose in Iowa in 2013?¹ This is about 1.4 deaths per 100,000 Iowans in 2013 compared to 1.17 deaths per 100,000 Iowans in 2012 (36 deaths) and 0.34 deaths per 100,000 Iowans in 2005 (10 deaths).¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states deaths from drug overdose have been rising steadily over the past two decades and have become the leading cause of injury and death in the United States.² Nearly 113 people in the United States die each day as a result of drug overdose, and another 6,748 are treated in ED for misuse or abuse of drugs.²

What are opioids?

Opioids are prescription medications that are often prescribed by doctors to help individuals with severe or chronic pain. Some of the commonly used opioids include oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, codeine, methadone, and meperidine. Opioids are the most frequently abused prescription drugs, with the highest percentage of misuse among individuals aged 18 to 25 years.³



Opioids abuse and misuse occurs when:

- Someone other than the patient consumes the prescribed opioids;
- Individuals consume more medication at one time than prescribed;
- Individuals use the medication in a method other than how it was prescribed; and
- Individuals intentionally use the prescribed opioids to get high.

Health Effects of Opioids

Studies indicate that adverse events most commonly associated with opioids include constipation, dizziness, drowsiness, nausea and vomiting.⁴ Serious long-term problems associated with opioids include:

- Breathing problems;
- Addiction;
- ED visits;
- Immunosuppression;
- Sexually transmitted infections; and
- Overdoses and overdose deaths.

People who abuse opioids are more likely to use other illicit drugs, engage in violence and other risky behaviors, all of which are serious public health problems. Opioids are beneficial when used as prescribed, but abuse happens when they are over-prescribed and due to ease of access, both of which could pose serious consequences.⁴

References

1. Iowa Department of Public Health. Vital Statistics. (2013) Available upon request.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prescription Drug Overdose in the United States: Fact Sheet. Available from URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/overdose/facts.html>.
3. Richard S, Linda T, Chungyeol S, Ekaretrina R, Cleve R, Mark G, and Mark F. Longitudinal effects of universal prevention intervention on prescription drug misuse: The randomized controlled trials with late adolescents and young adults. *American Journal of Public Health* 2013; 103(4):665-672.
4. Gary MF. Opioids for chronic noncancer pain. *American Academy of Neurology* 2014; 14:1277-1284.