

The epidemic before the pandemic

Long before the coronavirus pandemic, the United States was fighting an opioid epidemic. How did we get here? In the year before COVID-19, the U.S. saw 10.3 million people misuse prescription opioids. Prescription misuse means taking a medication in a manner or dose other than the way it was prescribed. For instance, taking pills in a greater amount or taking them more frequently than prescribed. Prescription misuse increases a person's risk of addiction. In 2018, prescription misuse resulted in 81,000 people using heroin for the first time, 2 million people developing an opioid use disorder, and more than 130 people dying every day because of opioid overdose. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has only added further strain to the opioid epidemic as preliminary data show an increase in both drug use and drug overdose during the pandemic.

Since most opioid addictions begin with prescription opioids, it might be helpful to review some safe practices to keep prescription opioids away from children and teens. Consider the following tips in order to better protect your loved ones:

- Store medicines in a safe location that is out of reach for young kids.
- Monitor your medications (know how many and/or how much).
- Always put medications away when you are finished using them. They can be easily forgotten and left out.
- Dispose of medications that are expired or unused.
- Never tell children medicine is candy to encourage them to take it. This could increase the likelihood that they try to swallow other medications.
- Talk with kids and loved ones about the dangers of prescription misuse.

Reference:

US Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.) *Help and resources: National opioid crisis.*
<https://www.hhs.gov/opioids>

Source:

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