



News Release

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PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER DEATHS DROP FOR FIRST TIME IN DECADE

Increase in Deaths from Heroin Reinforce Need for Ongoing Efforts

COLUMBUS – Ohio’s efforts to combat the abuse of prescription painkillers are paying off and new data released today by the Ohio Department of Health show that the number of deaths from unintended overdoses of prescription opiates declined in 2012 for the first time since 2003. At the same time, however, information also shows an alarming increase in the number of deaths from overdoses of illegal opiates such as heroin, reinforcing the need for ongoing efforts to combat both the supply and demand of illegal drugs in Ohio.

“Ohio’s making a difference against prescription drug abuse because so many people have come together at the local and state level, in education, law enforcement, health care and the treatment community. When we make up our mind to do something important like this we can do it. We need to remember that as Ohio continues to work with its partners to combat illegal drugs like heroin, it’s clear that the problems we once saw in prescription drugs are, in part, migrating to illegal drugs,” said Lance Himes, Interim Director of the Ohio Department of Health. “Ohio’s *Start Talking!* campaign has been well received and its mission, as well as the work of so many other state and local leaders on drug abuse prevention, is essential if we want to see the same drop in illegal drug deaths as we’re seeing in prescription drug deaths.”

In 2012 there were 697 deaths from unintended overdoses of prescription opiates, down from 789 in 2011, a decline of nearly 12 percent. This is the first decline since 2003 when there were 221 deaths.

Until 2012 there had been a steady increase in drug overdose deaths, with deaths rising 366 percent between 2000 and 2012. Prescription drugs were the largest part of that increase. The 2012 data reveals a significant shift in this trend, however, with a decline in prescription opioid-related overdose deaths contrasted by an increase in heroin-related deaths. Overall, unintentional drug overdoses caused 1,914 deaths.

“We’re encouraged by the drop in prescription drug-related deaths, but our work is not finished,” said Orman Hall, director of the Governor’s Cabinet Opiate Action Team (GCOAT). “Ohio, like the rest of the nation, has seen a surge in the availability and use of heroin and, accordingly, the state is shifting its focus to provide pathways to treatment for those Ohioans struggling with addiction and to work even harder to prevent substance abuse before it starts.”

Recent efforts to combat opioid abuse in Ohio include the launch of the [Start Talking!](#) program, establishment of a six-county drug court pilot for treatment of opiate abuse and the funding of a pilot to improve health outcomes and reduce costs associated with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).

Complete drug overdose death data from 2012 is available on the ODH website at <http://www.healthy.ohio.gov/vipp/data/rxdata.aspx>

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Ohio's initiatives to fight opiate addiction include:

- 2014: Gov. John R. Kasich signs HB 170 into law, expanding the use of naloxone so that first responders can administer the drug; allowing family and friends to get prescriptions for loved ones at risk of overdosing on opioids; and grants immunity to prescribers and for those trying to save a life by administering the overdose-reversal drug.
- 2014: Gov. Kasich champions new Start Talking! youth drug prevention initiative, encouraging parents, educators and other trusted adults to have frequent, ongoing conversations with their children about the dangers of alcohol and other drugs.
- 2014: ODH releases latest Ohio Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) which indicates a 50 percent decrease in the number of Ohio teens who used a prescription painkiller without a doctor's prescription.
- 2014: An analysis of data from the Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS) shows a 40 percent reduction in the number of prescription opioids dispensed at rates equal to or greater than 80 mg Morphine Equivalent Daily Dose "trigger point" established by Ohio's prescriber guidelines.
- 2013: Ohio expands Medicaid eligibility; making health care more accessible for both physical and behavioral health conditions and freeing up \$70 million in local funds that can then be used for additional treatment services.
- 2013: ODH funds additional Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) sites in Ross, Stark and Hamilton Counties. Once implemented, these sites will join existing sites in Cuyahoga, Scioto and Montgomery Counties. OhioMHAS state hospital facilities also begin distribution of naloxone.
- 2013: GCOAT introduces opioid prescribing guidelines for Ohio's health care providers to encourage safer pain management practices.
- 2013: OhioMHAS partners with Ohio Medicaid to announce Maternal Opiate Medical Support (MOMS) pilot project to provide treatment services to mothers who are dependent on opioids and reduce costly medical expenses associated with neonatal abstinence syndrome among newborns.
- 2013: New Southern Ohio Addiction Treatment Center established in Jackson County, addressing gap in local services for individuals who are opioid-dependent.
- 2013: GCOAT announces Addiction Treatment Pilot Project (ATPP) to provide Medication-Assisted Treatment to drug court participants in Allen, Crawford, Franklin, Hardin, Hocking and Mercer counties.
- 2013: OhioMHAS receives a \$10 million federal grant to support the implementation of a screening and wellness tool for physicians called SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment). SBIRT also becomes a billable service under Medicaid.
- 2013: Creating strong partnerships with local law enforcement by investing \$3 million in savings achieved through the department consolidation in services working with local jails to reduce recidivism.
- 2012: GCOAT rolls out emergency department and urgent care opioid prescribing guidelines
- 2012: ODH provides seed funding for a pilot naloxone education and distribution program: Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) in Scioto County
- 2012: Medication-Assisted Treatment services now reimbursable through Medicaid, including the use of the drug Vivitrol.
- 2012: Drug drop box projects get underway in conjunction with ODH and OhioMHAS, Drug Free Action Alliance and the Ohio Attorney General's office

- 2011: Ohio laid the framework in 2011 for slowing the abuse of prescription drug abuse under the leadership of Governor John R. Kasich. Closing the “pill mills” in southern Ohio through enactment of HB 93.
- 2011: Gov. Kasich signs Executive Order authorizing greater flexibility around Medication-Assisted Treatment, expanding FDA-approved treatment options for Ohioans impacted by heroin and other opiate addiction.