

New CDC Report Discusses Trends In Growing U.S. Heroin Epidemic

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The ***Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*** and the ***Food and Drug Administration (FDA)*** have published a new report discussing trends in the growing heroin epidemic in the United States. The [July 7, 2015 report](#) examined data from the 2002 – 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, which revealed significant increases in ***heroin*** use and addiction, as well as a 286% increase in heroin-related overdose deaths during that period. The greatest increases in heroin use have occurred in groups with historically low rates of heroin use, including women and individuals with private insurance and higher incomes. In the past decade, the gaps between men and women, between individuals with low and higher incomes and between individuals with Medicaid and private insurance have narrowed with respect to use of the drug.

The report also identified risk factors and trends related to the illegal and highly addictive opioid drug. The strongest risk factor for heroin abuse or dependence is abuse or dependence on prescription opioid painkillers. In fact, individuals addicted to prescription opioid painkillers are forty times more likely to become addicted to heroin. In addition, the report found that people who are addicted to alcohol are two times more likely to become addicted to heroin, people who are addicted to marijuana are three times more likely to become addicted to heroin and people who are addicted to cocaine are fifteen times more likely to become addicted to heroin.

“Heroin use is increasing at an alarming rate in many parts of society, driven by both the prescription opioid epidemic and cheaper, more available heroin,” said CDC Director Tom Frieden, M.D., M.P.H. “To reverse this trend we need an all-of-society response – to improve opioid prescribing practices to prevent addiction, expand access to effective treatment for those who are addicted, increase use of naloxone to reverse overdoses, and work with law enforcement partners like DEA to reduce the supply of heroin.”

Employers should consider educating their workforces about the risks involved in the use of prescription opioid medications, as we discussed in [this recent article post](#), as well as the alarming rise in heroin abuse. Employers also should consider whether a drug testing program is right for their workplace if they have not already done so.

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