



West Virginia, New Hampshire among Most Affected by Opioid Crisis

February 27, 2019

February 27, 2019 - PRESSADVANTAGE -

Early evidence suggests that the explosive rate of opioid deaths has started to slow. However, more than 49,000 people in the United States were killed by this opioid epidemic in 2017 alone. A new study reveals which part of the country has been most affected by the ongoing health crisis.

A study of opioid deaths from 1999 to 2016 found that opioid mortality, in general, is skyrocketing. More specifically, the mortality rate from synthetic opioids in 28 states more than doubled every two years from 1999 to 2016. The District of Columbia saw the greatest increase in its opioid mortality rate, which more than tripled every year since 2013. Click the link to see Los Angeles's top rehab placement programs.

The study, published in the journal JAMA Network Open, identified the other states that were most affected by the opioid crisis.

New Hampshire and West Virginia, in particular, saw the biggest drops in life expectancy due to opioid deaths. On the other hand, Montana and Oregon were the only states to see a decline in opioid deaths from 1999 to 2016.

At the national level, opioids were responsible for shaving 0.36 years off Americans' life expectancy in 2016. This means a greater loss of life than caused by guns or accidents involving motor vehicles.

"One thing I do want to highlight is that, despite the large differences in deaths across states, there's no evidence to suggest that there are differences in use," said Mathew Kiang, a postdoctoral research fellow at Stanford University's Center for Population Health Sciences. "What we think is happening is that the heroin just continues to get more and more potent in the eastern United States, whereas heroin [in] the western United States has traditionally been this brown tar heroin. It's much harder to lace with Fentanyl or other synthetic opioids."

Fentanyl is particularly lethal because it is known to be up to 50 times more powerful than heroin. Just a quarter of a milligram can be deadly. For comparison, a standard low-dose aspirin is 81mg. If the tablet was to be cut into 324 pieces, one of those pieces would equal $\frac{1}{4}$ milligram.

"Emerging research suggests the opioid epidemic has evolved as a series of three intertwined but distinct epidemics, or waves, based on the types of opioids associated with mortality," the study said.

The three waves were identified as the 1990s to 2010; 2010 to present, and 2013 to present. In 1990s-2010, the most prominent substances abused were prescription painkillers. From 2010 to the present, another epidemic that centers on heroin surged. As for 2013 to present epidemic, this is a synthetic opioid epidemic.

Kiang and his colleagues used data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics as well as the US census. With this data, they identified 351,630 opioid-related deaths from 1999 to 2016. Over this 18-year period, deaths from opioids increased by 455 percent. Men on average died at age 39.8, while women died at age 43.5.

"Preventing opioid addiction is necessary for the long term so that this crisis ultimately comes to an end. And preventing opioid addiction really means much more cautious prescribing."

Kiang agrees that there are multiple factors at work. "We need to make treatment at least as accessible, available and affordable as heroin," he said. "It shouldn't be harder to get help than it is to get heroin."

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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