



# Addressing Alaska's Opioid Epidemic

From Understanding to Action

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*“The opioid epidemic is devastating American families and communities. To curb these trends and save lives, we must help prevent addiction and provide support and treatment to those who suffer from opioid use disorders.”*

*Dr. Tom Frieden,  
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
December 18, 2015*

# The Epidemic

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# The Epidemic

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- ❖ Drug overdoses now the leading cause of accidental death in the US, **exceeding deaths from automobile accidents**
- ❖ In 2016, drug overdoses likely killed more Americans (65,000) than the entire wars in Vietnam and Iraq, In comparison, more than 58,200 US troops died in the Vietnam War between 1955 and 1975, and more than 4,500 have died so far in the Iraq War since 2003 — which adds up to more than 62,700.
- ❖ More than six out of 10 drug overdose deaths in 2015 involved opioids, including opioid pain relievers and heroin ... that is almost 91 deaths a day

# How Did This Happen?

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## HIGH AVAILABILITY

207 million  
prescriptions  
for opioid  
medications

218% increase 1999-  
2011



## LOW SENSE OF RISK

Less than 1/2 of teens  
see trying Rx as risky

Higher heroin purity,  
first snorted not  
injected

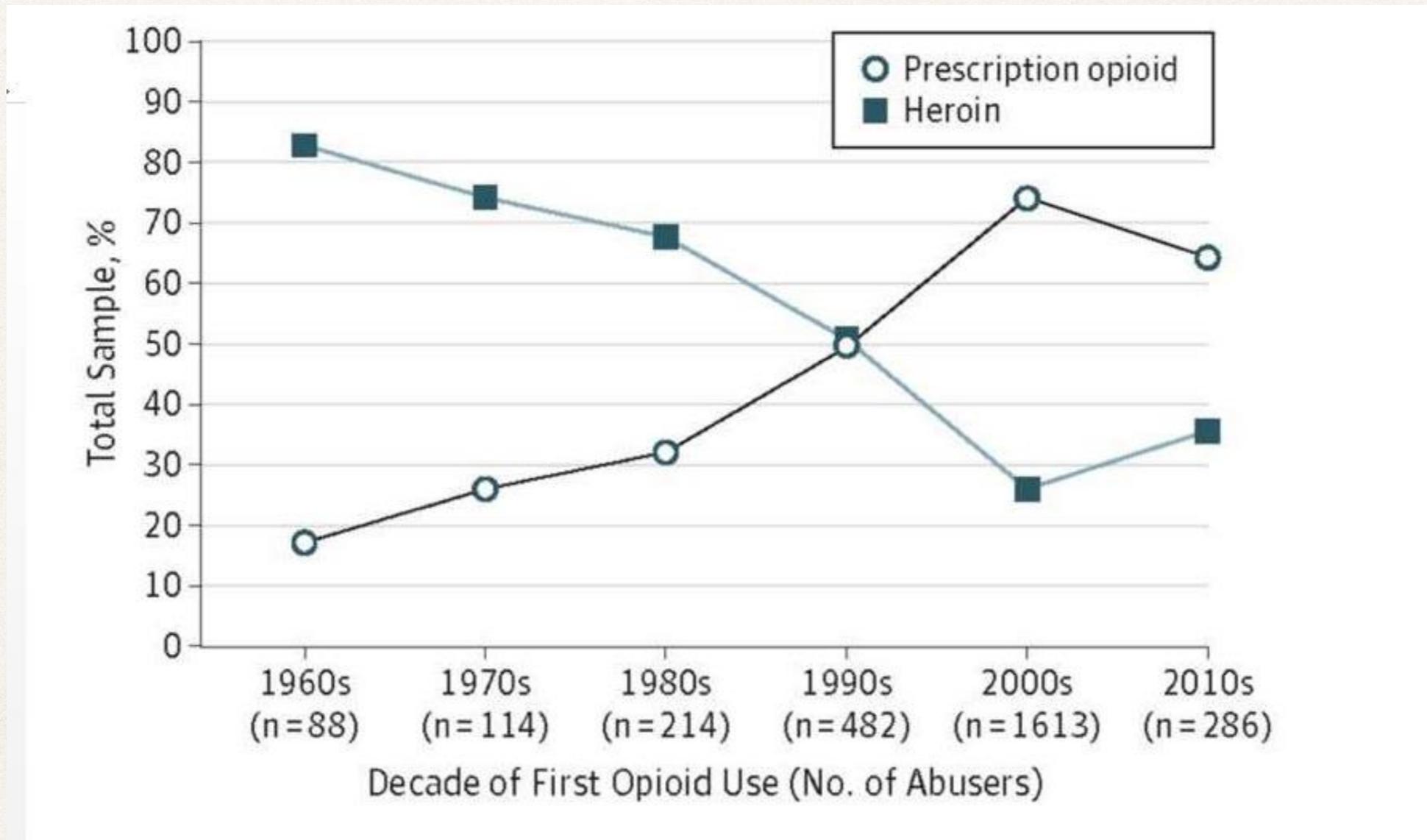


## INCREASED USE

Heroin use doubled  
among those 18-25 and  
tripled among adults  
26+

Heroin deaths  
increased >400%

# Link: Prescription Opioids & Heroin



Percentage of the total heroin-dependent sample that used heroin or a prescription opioid as their first opioid of abuse. Data are plotted as a function of the decade in which respondents initiated their opioid abuse. *Source: Cicero et al., 2014; NIDA:*

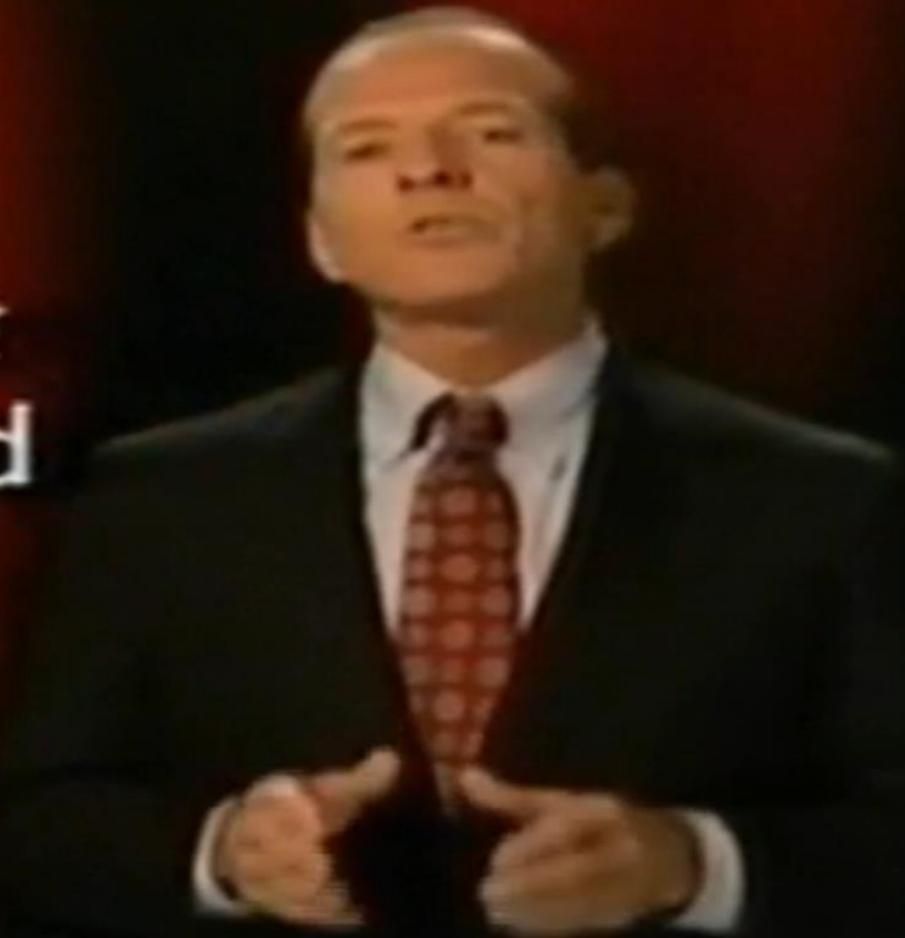
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/relationship-between-prescription-drug-heroin-abuse/prescription-opioid-use-risk-factor-heroin-use>

# How Did This Happen?

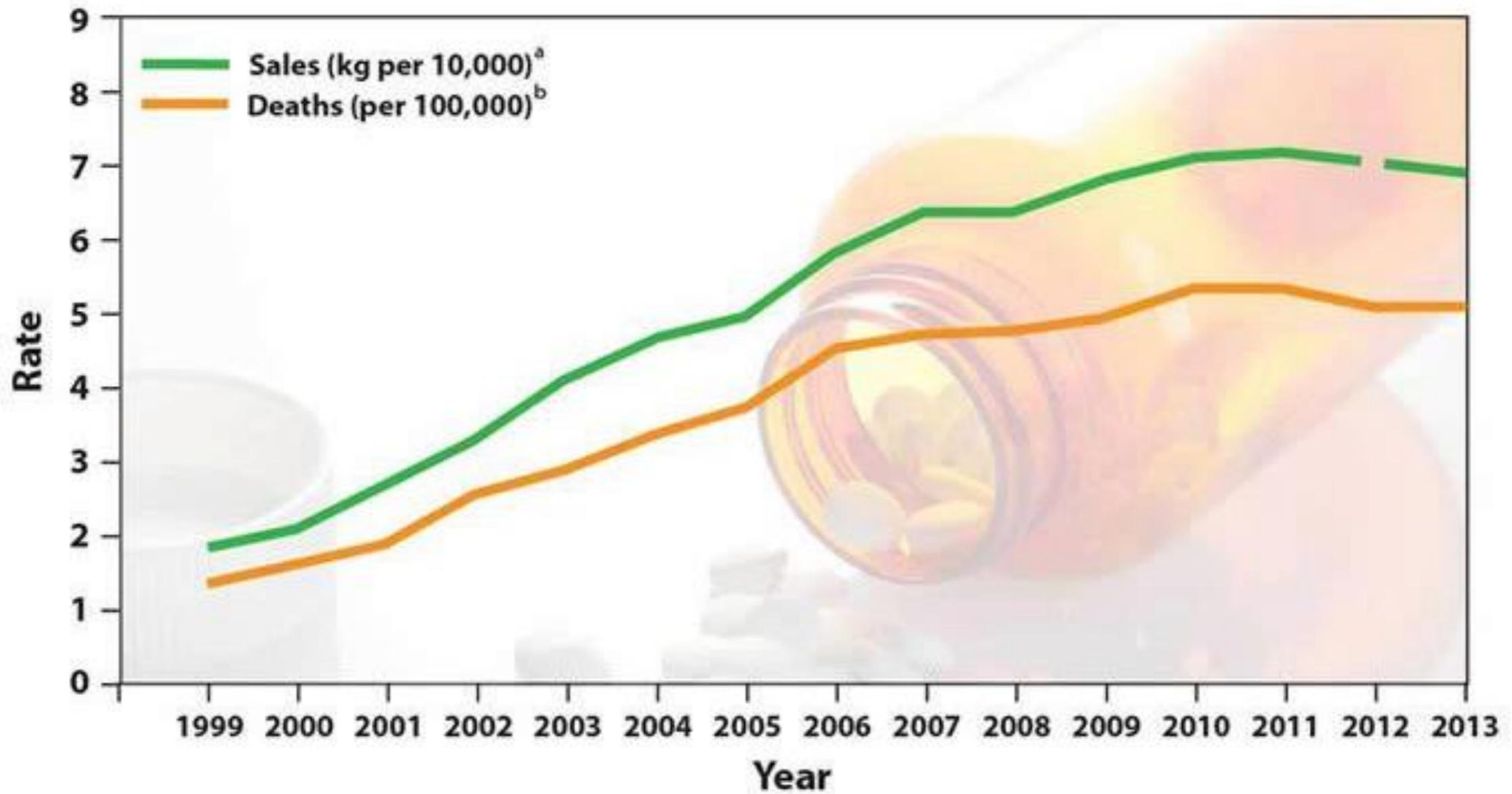
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Your doctor might  
prescribe an opioid  
medication.

Less than 1% of  
patients become  
addicted.



# How Did This Happen?



Sources:

<sup>a</sup>Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System (ARCOS) of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), 2012 data not available.

<sup>b</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Vital Statistics System mortality data. (2015) Available from URL:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/deaths.htm>.

# How Did This Happen?

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## Medical Fallacies Driving the Increased Prescribing of Opioids

- ❖ Pain can be objectively measured
- ❖ Tolerance is just under-dosing
- ❖ Pseudoaddiction: persons who display drug-seeking behavior are simply in pain and need more opioids
  - “If your medicine makes you feel better, then your diagnosis must be whatever the medicine was meant to treat” –Ann Lembke, MD, in *Drug Dealer, MD*
- ❖ When used in treatment of pain, very little risk of subsequent misuse or addiction

# Opioid Epidemic in Alaska

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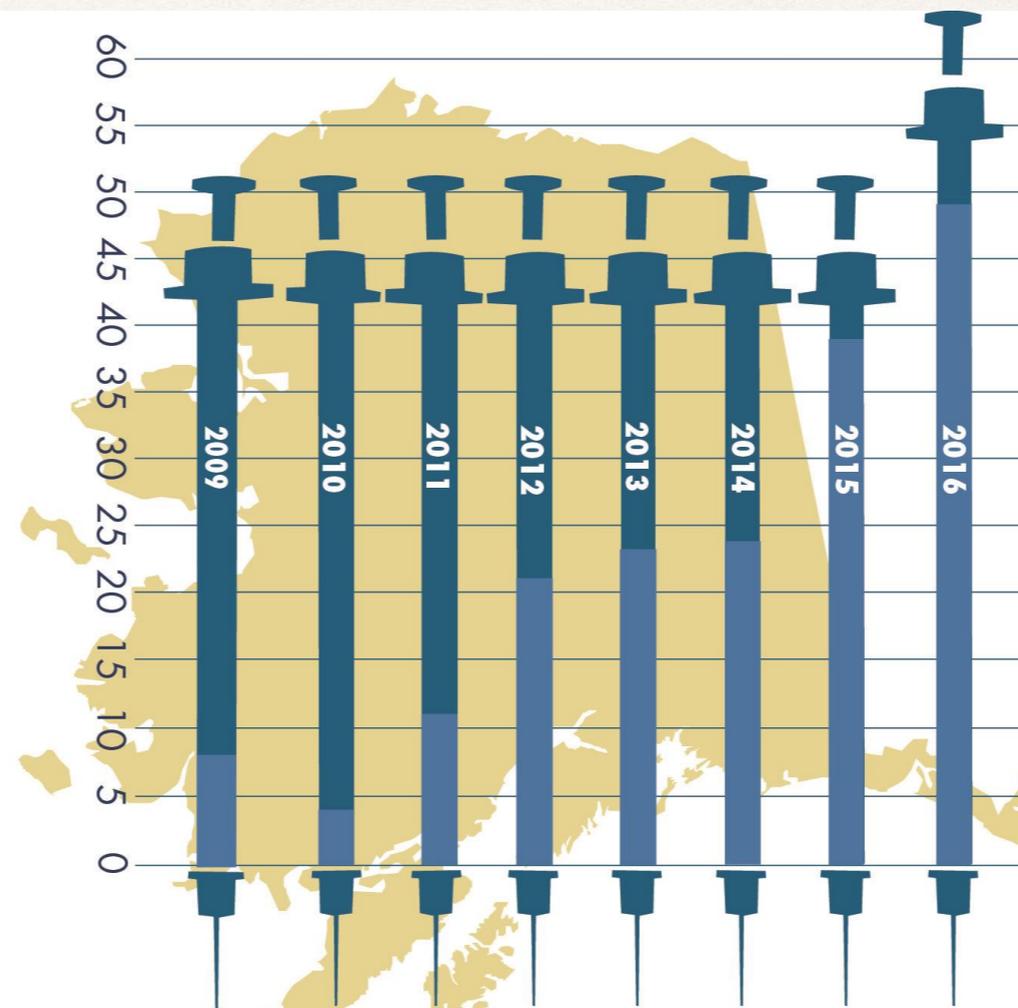
**2X**

In 2012, Alaska's prescription **opioid** pain reliever overdose death rate was more than double the rate in the United States.

Alaska's **heroin**-associated overdose death rate was over 50 percent higher than the national rate.

**50%↑**

# Opioid Epidemic in Alaska



## Heroin deaths in Alaska

From 2009 to 2016,  
the number of  
heroin-associated  
deaths **more than  
quadrupled.**

What do we need to know

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What are opioids?

# What Are Opioid?

Opioids are made from the opium poppy plant or artificially produced to have similar effects



*Opioids refer to synthetic and organic drugs. Opiates are organic only.*



Codeine



Oxycontin



Vicodin



Fentanyl



Powder Heroin



Black Tar Heroin

# How do opioids work?

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- ❖ Bind to receptors in the:

- brain
- spinal cord
- gastrointestinal tract

- ❖ Affects:

- mood
- blood pressure
- breathing



Source: Am Health Drug Benefits. 2015 *New Perspectives in the Treatment of Opioid-Induced Respiratory Depression*. Oct; 8(6 suppl3): S51–S63

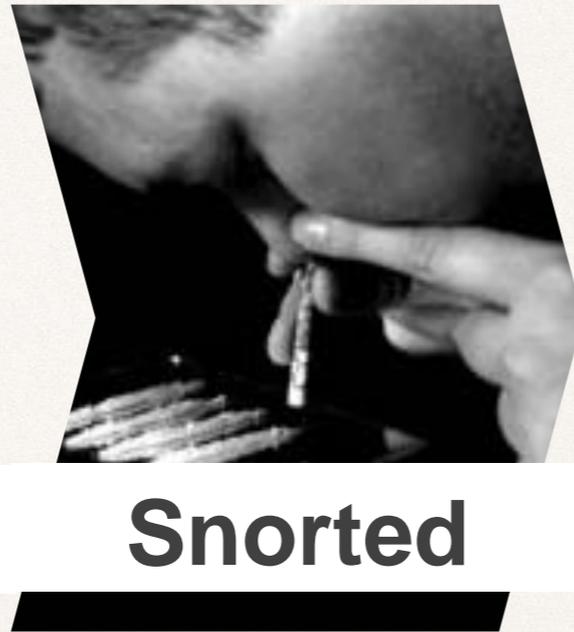
Image Source: NIDA

# How Are Opioids Abused?

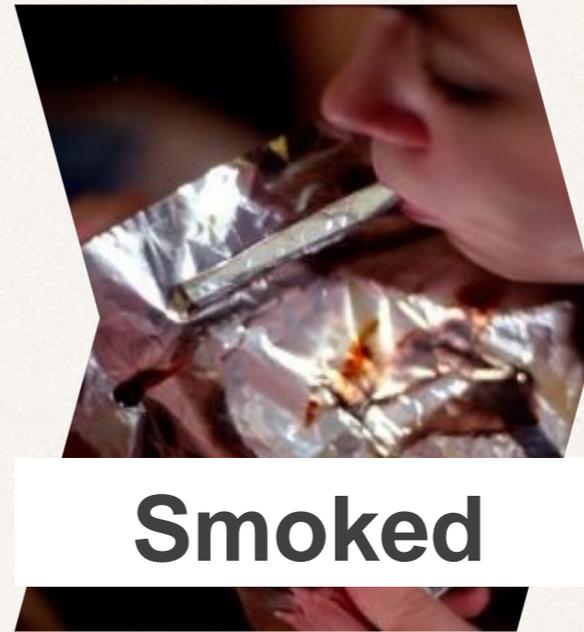
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**Swallowed**



**Snorted**



**Smoked**



**Injected**

Injection especially risky

- Spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C;
- Damage veins and cause abscesses; and
- Can lead to bacterial infection of the blood and heart problems

# Opioid Risks

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Opioids become even more dangerous when:

- ❖ Consumed with alcohol, stimulants, or sedatives
- ❖ Combined with other substances
- ❖ Some add bulk or “cut” heroin , like baby powder to rat poison
- ❖ Some make the drug more powerful like illicit fentanyl
- ❖ Individuals never know what they’ll get
  - ❖ Fentanyl driving many overdoses

# Why do people start abusing opioids?

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A person may:

- ❖ Be prescribed medications for pain and begin to misuse their medication
- ❖ Develop tolerance to pain pills begin to increase the dose on their own or snort or use a needle to increase the effect
- ❖ Use to cope with emotional stress or pain
- ❖ Experiment with opioids as a way to get high

# Why do people keep using opioids?

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- ❖ The body develops “tolerance” and opioids are less likely to get a user “high”
- ❖ But stopping use can result in withdrawal:
  - Muscle aches; restlessness; anxiety
  - Diarrhea; abdominal cramping; nausea and vomiting; rapid heartbeat; high blood pressure
- ❖ Emotional withdrawal can last for months and there is a high risk of relapse during first months of stopping



# Drug Misuse in Alaska

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## The Economic Impact

# Alaska's Economic Impact

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- The economic costs of drug abuse in Alaska total billions of dollars each year. Costs to society include increased health care costs, increased criminal justice system costs, lost or reduced workplace productivity, greater spending on public assistance and social services, and a range of other impacts.

# Alaska's Economic Impact

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- In 2015, the estimated cost of drug abuse to the Alaska economy totaled just under \$1.22 billion. These costs are borne by state and local governments, employers, and residents of Alaska. Productivity losses are the largest component of these annual economic costs (45 percent or \$542 million).
  - Productivity Loss = \$542 million, 45%
  - Traffic Collisions = \$396 million, 33%
  - Criminal Justice and Protective Services = \$136 million, 11%
  - Health Care = \$134 million, 11%
  - Public Assistance and Social Services = \$7 million, 1%
- Total = \$1,215 million, 100%