

Fewer children die in accidents; drug overdoses up

April 16 2012, By MIKE STOBBE , AP Medical Writer

(AP) -- Accidents are killing far fewer children and teenagers than in the past, according to a new government report released Monday.

The death rate for youths ages 19 and younger dropped about 30 percent from 2000 to 2009. The number of deaths dropped too, from about 12,400 to about 9,100.

"We've made progress, and because we've made progress our children are safer than ever before," said Ileana Arias of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the agency that released the report.

But accidental injuries remain the leading cause of death for youths ages 1 to 19. On average, one child dies every hour from fires, falls and other accidents, she added.

A 41 percent drop in traffic fatalities had a huge impact on the numbers - crashes annually account for half or more of kids' deaths from accidents. The CDC didn't analyze exactly what caused that decline, but officials believe it was helped by measures like graduated driver's licenses and use of child safety and booster seats.

Childhood deaths from drownings, fires and falls also plummeted.

Meanwhile, the CDC saw an alarming jump in deaths from prescription drug overdoses, a trend seen in adults but which also reaches down into the ranks of older teenagers.

Accidental poisonings for all kids and teens rose by 80 percent, to 824 in 2009, according to the new report. About half of the most recent poisoning deaths were adolescents ages 15 to 19 who overdosed on prescription drugs.

For some kids, prescription medications - some of them snagged from parents' medicine cabinets - appear to be replacing marijuana as gateway drugs, said Arias, the CDC's principal deputy director.

The toll from suffocations also rose, to 1,160 deaths in 2009. Roughly 1,000 of those were infants ages 1 and younger, a group for which the suffocation rate climbed 54 percent.

CDC officials repeated their call for parents to put babies to bed on their backs, remove loose bedding materials and take other steps to make cribs and sleeping places safer.

The report also looked at trends in individual states. The authors saw declines in almost every state, with the biggest drops in Delaware, Iowa, Oregon and Virginia.

Mississippi continued to have the worst numbers, with an accidental death rate in 2009 of 25 per 100,000 people ages 19 and younger. Massachusetts had the lowest rate at 4 per 100,000.

The CDC report was based on death certificate information for youths ages 19 and younger for the years 2000 through 2009.

More information: CDC child safety page:
<http://www.cdc.gov/safechild>

CDC report: <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns>

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