

One of eight deaths among young adults related to opioid use, research finds

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One of every eight deaths among young adults in Ontario is related to opioids, making the drugs a leading cause of premature death, researchers have found.

The study, published July 7 in *Addiction*, found that opioid-related deaths more than doubled in the province over 19 years – rising from 127 deaths in 1991 to 550 deaths in 2010.

"Alarming, we found that approximately one of every 170 deaths in Ontario may be related to opioid overdose," said Assistant Professor Tara Gomes, lead author of the study and a scientist at the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's Hospital and the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences.

"That number jumps to one in eight deaths among those aged 25 to 34."

Opioids include strong painkillers like morphine, codeine and oxycodone. The misuse and abuse of opioids has become increasingly prevalent across North America due to a variety of factors, including their broad accessibility and the perception that opioids are safe because they are prescription drugs.

Researchers reviewed 5,935 opioid-related deaths between 1991 and 2010. Such overdoses result in 21,927 years of potential life lost annually – which exceeds losses due to alcohol use disorders, pneumonia, HIV/AIDS and influenza.

"The extraordinary toll of early death related to [opioids](#) highlights the public health and social burden of [opioid overdose](#), especially among [young adults](#)," said Gomes, who is also a scientist at ICES.

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Provided by University of Toronto

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