

Heroin use levels off in U.S., but still high: report

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Number of people needing treatment also rose in recent years.

(HealthDay)—Levels of heroin use in the United States have stabilized but are still high, federal officials reported Thursday.

In 2013, about 681,000 Americans aged 12 and older said they had used heroin in the past year. That number has remained steady since 2009, but it is still much higher than between 2002 and 2008, when the numbers ranged from 314,000 to 455,000, the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) report found.

"Heroin use has reached alarming levels throughout our nation, and we must work together to overcome this serious [public health threat](#)," SAMHSA Administrator Pamela Hyde said in an agency news release.

The report also found that 169,000 Americans 12 and older used heroin

for the first time in 2013, including 21,000 teens ages 12 to 17 and 66,000 [young adults](#) ages 18 to 25.

Overall, an average of 460 Americans a day try heroin for the first time, according to SAMHSA.

Also, the number of Americans who received treatment for a heroin problem rose from 277,000 in 2002 to 526,000 in 2013, the report found.

Conversely, the proportion of people 12 and older who thought heroin would be fairly easy or very easy to obtain fell from 18 percent in 2002 to 15 percent in 2013. The decline was largest—from nearly 16 percent to 9 percent—among those ages 12 to 17.

Even though heroin use is still relatively uncommon compared to other illegal drugs, the findings are cause for concern, the report authors said. Heroin is highly addictive and is associated with serious health risks such as exposure to hepatitis C, HIV and other infectious diseases. And potentially fatal overdoses are always a risk, the researchers added.

"It takes collective effort from all parts of our communities to educate and prevent heroin use and addiction," Hyde said. "Everyone needs to know how to identify people with a heroin problem, help them find treatment, and know how to help prevent overdose deaths."

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more about [heroin](#).

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