

# Opioids plus other drugs a deadly mix for heavy users

December 5 2018

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(HealthDay)—One in four long-term users of opioid painkillers may be

at risk for overdose because of overlapping prescriptions for other drugs, researchers report.

The findings stem from an analysis of all [prescriptions](#) of controlled substances for nearly 302,000 patients that were reported in the state of Idaho in 2017.

One-third of the patients prescribed a controlled substance were chronic users, meaning they'd taken the drug for more than 90 days without a break of at least seven days.

Nearly one-fourth of those chronic users were also prescribed a benzodiazepine or other central nervous system depressants. This combination of drugs puts patients at risk of overdose, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Forty-four percent of the risky overlapping prescriptions were written by more than one prescriber, according to the Idaho State University study. It was presented Tuesday at an American Society for Health-System Pharmacists meeting, in Anaheim, Calif.

"Patients with [chronic pain](#) are often under the care of several different physicians to manage their different disease states," explained researcher Catherine Oliphant, a professor of pharmacy practice at Idaho State.

"This co-management can lead to patients receiving unintentional prescription combinations that put them at higher risk for an [opioid overdose](#)," she explained in a society news release.

But 56 percent of the dangerous drug combinations were written by the same prescriber, which shows the need for continued education on appropriate [opioid](#) prescribing, Oliphant said.

She noted that pharmacists are in a position to intervene when they identify patients with overlapping prescriptions for opioids and benzodiazepines or other central nervous system depressants.

Pharmacists can promote communication between prescribers, educate [patients](#) and prescribers on the risks of dangerous drug combinations, and prescribe an opioid overdose treatment such as naloxone, Oliphant said.

Research presented at meetings is considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

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

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Citation: Opioids plus other drugs a deadly mix for heavy users (2018, December 5) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-12-opioids-drugs-deadly-heavy-users.html>

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