

Drug overdoses driving down US life expectancy: health officials

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Drug overdoses have driven the first significant reduction in US life expectancy since the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s, an official report published Wednesday showed.

Americans have lost almost four months of longevity since 2014, the report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

"This is the first big drop since 1993, and the main driver behind that was the HIV epidemic," Renee Gindi, a health statistician for the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics told AFP.

An American born in 2017 can expect to live an average of 78.6 years, compared to 78.9 years in 2014, according to the report which confirms previously published preliminary data.

Up until the 1960s, life expectancy was under 70 years.

The recent decline illustrates the devastating impact of the opioid crisis, especially synthetic opioids like fentanyl, which can be deadly even in minute quantities of a few milligrams.

Opioid overdoses killed 32,000 people last year, according to provisional figures.

The United States ranks 28th among OECD countries in life expectancy. Japan is highest at 84.2 years.

Apart from overdoses, suicides and the rising death toll caused by Alzheimer's disease were also responsible for the erosion of life expectancy, which was much more marked in men than in women.

Gindi compared the period to 1992-93, the height of the HIV epidemic.

"That drop in [life expectancy](#) that we started to see was a real clarion call to say that this was an issue that needed attention and that was, in a very similar way, killing people who are in these younger age groups," she said.

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