

California judge sides with drug companies in opioid lawsuit

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(HealthDay)—A California judge has ruled against local governments

that sued drug companies for billions of dollars to recover their costs of dealing with the opioid epidemic.

In a tentative ruling issued Monday, Orange County Superior Court Judge Peter Wilson rejected the plaintiffs' claims the companies used deceptive marketing to increase unnecessary prescriptions of [opioid](#) painkillers, the *Associated Press* reported.

"There is simply no evidence to show that the rise in prescriptions was not the result of the medically appropriate provision of pain medications to patients in need," Wilson wrote in a ruling that entailed more than 40 pages, the *AP* reported.

The lawsuit by Los Angeles, Orange and Santa Clara counties and the city of Oakland names Johnson & Johnson, AbbVie Inc.'s Allergan subsidiary, Endo International, Teva Pharmaceutical Industries and other companies in its lawsuit.

While disappointed by the ruling, the [local governments](#) said they planned to appeal to "ensure no opioid manufacturer can engage in reckless corporate practices that compromise public health in the state for their own profit," the *AP* reported.

The drug companies "successfully transformed the way doctors treat chronic pain, opening the floodgates of opioid prescribing and use," the lawsuit contends. "This explosion in opioid prescriptions and use has padded Defendants' profit margins at the expense of [chronic pain](#) patients."

The plaintiffs projected that it could cost \$50 billion to provide comprehensive opioid abatement programs in the four jurisdictions that filed the lawsuit, the *AP* reported. The money would go for things like ongoing opioid abuse prevention and [treatment programs](#) in Los Angeles

and Santa Clara counties.

Nearly a half-million Americans have died from opioid abuse since 2001, the *AP* reported.

The [drug companies](#) welcomed the judge's ruling. In a statement, Johnson & Johnson said the decision showed it engaged in "appropriate and responsible" marketing of its opioid medications, the *AP* reported.

Thousands of similar lawsuits have been filed nationwide by cities, counties and states, but this was just the second such case to go to trial. In 2019, an Oklahoma judge ordered Johnson & Johnson to pay \$465 million, but the company is appealing the decision, the *AP* reported.

Other lawsuits have resulted in large settlements or proposed settlements.

More information: Visit the National Institute on Drug Abuse for more on [opioids](#).

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