

Jury rules against pharmacy chains in big US opioid case

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An Ohio jury decided Tuesday that pharmacies owned by Walmart, Walgreens and CVS bear responsibility for the opioid crisis in two counties in the US state.

The three companies acted illegally in filling significant [opioid](#) prescriptions in Lake and Trumbell counties, creating an "oversupply" of the drugs and a "public nuisance," a jury in a [federal court](#) in Cleveland found.

The case marks the first instance in which distributors of the addictive painkillers—rather than manufacturers—have been found liable for the health crisis that has claimed more than 500,000 lives in the United States over the last two decades.

A [federal judge](#) will assess penalties in the case against the companies. All three firms released statements signaling plans to appeal.

The decision could prompt complaints from additional parties in the crisis, which has already spawned significant litigation and several major settlements.

Pharmacy chains Rite Aid and Giant Eagle had earlier agreed to settlements with Lake and Trumbell counties.

Litigants against opioid producers have however suffered setbacks recently in California and Oklahoma, where the latter state's [supreme court](#) recently overturned a \$465 million ruling against Johnson & Johnson after concluding that a lower court should not have relied on the public nuisance law.

But Tuesday's decision showed similar claims against the drugstore chains resonated juries.

"We strongly disagree with the decision," a spokesperson for CVS said.

"The simple facts are that opioid prescriptions are written by doctors, not pharmacists; opioid medications are made and marketed by

manufacturers, not pharmacists; and our health care system depends on pharmacists to fill legitimate prescriptions that doctors deem necessary for their patients."

Lake County praised the verdict and said that between 2012 and 2016, some 265 pills for every resident were dispensed in the area.

"Today's announcement is tremendous news for our families and communities," said county commissioner Ron Young.

"Most of us know someone who has been impacted by opioids and future resources will allow the county and our partners to provide increased resources to get peoples' lives back on track."

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