

# Deaths due to opioid toxicity up in U.S. during COVID-19

July 13 2023, by Elana Gotkine

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Deaths due to opioid toxicity increased during the COVID-19 pandemic,

according to a study published online July 7 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Tara Gomes, Ph.D., from St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, and colleagues characterized the societal burden of unintended opioid-related deaths in the United States. The proportion of all deaths that were attributable to unintentional opioid [toxicity](#) were examined by year and age group. In addition, the total years of life lost (YLL) due to unintentional opioid toxicity was estimated, overall, and by sex and age group.

Data were included for 422,605 unintentional deaths due to opioid toxicity between 2011 and 2021. The researchers found that there was a 289% increase in the number of unintentional deaths due to opioid toxicity, from 19,395 to 75,477. From 2011 to 2021, the %age of all deaths that were attributed to opioid toxicity increased from 1.8 to 4.5%. By 2021, opioid toxicity was responsible for 10.2, 21.7, and 21.0% of deaths among those aged 15 to 19, 20 to 29, and 30 to 39 years, respectively. Over the study period, the YLL due to opioid toxicity increased 276%. YLL plateaued between 2017 and 2019 (7.0 and 7.2 YLL per 1,000) but then increased by 62.9% between 2019 and 2021, reaching 11.7 YLL per 1,000.

"The crisis of deaths due to opioid toxicity across the U.S. worsened substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with one in 22 deaths in 2021 attributable to unintentional [opioid](#) toxicity," the authors write.

**More information:** Tara Gomes et al, Trends in Opioid Toxicity–Related Deaths in the US Before and After the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2011-2021, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.22303](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.22303)

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