

# New data identifies trends in accidental opioid overdoses in children

April 17 2024

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Overall, prescription opioid overdose ED visits of US children had a decreasing trend during the past decade. Credit: frolicsomepl, Pixabay, CC0 ([creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/](https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/))

The US saw a 22% decline in rates of prescription-opioid overdose

related emergency department (ED) visits in children 17 and younger between 2008 and 2019, but an uptick in the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new study published this week in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Henry Xiang of Nationwide Children's Hospital, US, and colleagues. The authors also note that rates of pediatric opioid overdoses remain high in many populations.

Opioid [overdose](#) has been declared a public health emergency in the United States but much of the focus has been on adults. In the new study, researchers analyzed overdoses in children by using data spanning 2008 to 2020 from the Nationwide Emergency Department Sample, which provides anonymized information on [emergency department](#) (ED) visits across the country.

Overall, prescription-[opioid overdose](#) ED visits for patients from 0–17 years old decreased by 22% from 2008 to 2019, and then increased by 12% in 2020. That overall increase could be mostly attributed to an increase in overdoses among males, children aged 12 to 17, and those in the West and Midwest. Across all time spans, the highest rates of overdoses were seen in ages 0 to 1 and ages 12 to 17, among females, and in urban teaching hospital EDs.

The authors conclude that efforts to reduce opioid overdoses should include increased focus on [young children](#) and adolescents and note that further studies could investigate the impact of the later years of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opioid epidemic.

The authors add, "Overall, prescription opioid overdose ED visits of US children had a decreasing trend during the past decade, suggesting the effectiveness of a variety of interventions and campaigns. However, 0 to 1 years and 12 to 17-year-olds still face a significant risk of prescription opioid overdose."

**More information:** Trends in pediatric prescription-opioid overdoses in U.S. emergency departments from 2008–2020: An epidemiologic study of pediatric opioid overdose ED visits, *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0299163](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0299163)

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Citation: New data identifies trends in accidental opioid overdoses in children (2024, April 17) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-trends-accidental-opioid-overdoses-children.html>

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