

Drug overdose epidemic top cause of US injury deaths

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Drug overdoses have reached epidemic levels in the United States where they are the leading cause of injury deaths, surpassing car accidents and gunshots, the Drug Enforcement Administration said Wednesday.

"Drug abuse is ending too many lives too soon and destroying families and communities," DEA Administrator Chuck Rosenberg said.

"We must reach young people at an even earlier age and teach them about its many dangers and horrors."

Some 46,471 people died of drug overdoses in 2013, the latest data available, while [car accidents](#) claimed the lives of 35,369 people and guns killed 33,636.

Drug overdose fatalities have climbed sharply in the past decade, up more than 50 percent from the 30,711 deaths reported in 2004. They first became the leading cause of [injury deaths](#) in 2008 amid a decline in car accident fatalities.

"Overdose deaths, particularly from [prescription drugs](#) and heroin, have reached [epidemic levels](#)," Rosenberg said.

The agency's annual drug threat assessment also found that heroin use is up sharply across the country.

A recent government survey found a 51 percent increase between 2013

and 2014 in the number of people who said they had used heroin in the past 30 days. Law enforcement seizures of the highly addictive drug nearly doubled from 2,763 kilograms in 2010 to 5,013 in 2014.

Yet prescription drugs remain a far deadlier problem, the DEA report said. More people abuse prescription medication than cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, MDMA and PCP combined and prescription drug deaths have outpaced those of cocaine and heroin combined since 2002.

Synthetic designer drugs from China "continue to wreak havoc in the United States," the agency noted.

Mexican drug cartels remain the primary suppliers of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana and their affiliated gangs "are a significant threat to the safety and security of our communities," the report said.

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