

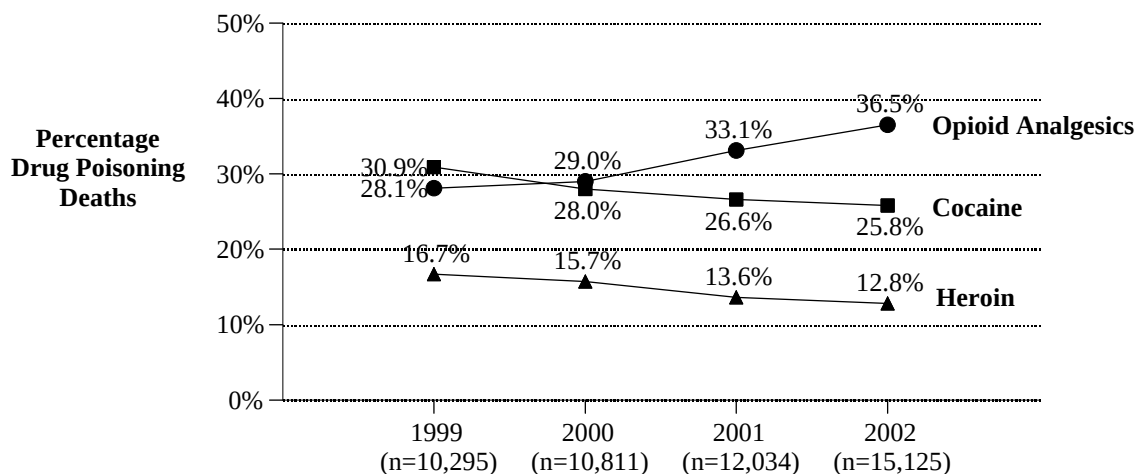
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Opioid Analgesics Most Common Cause of Unintentional Fatal Drug Poisoning in the U.S.

Opioid analgesics, such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, and methadone, are more likely than cocaine or heroin to be the cause of unintentional drug poisoning deaths[†] in the U.S., according to a recent analysis of mortality data from the National Center for Health Statistics. The percentage of unintentional drug poisoning deaths involving opioid analgesics has been increasing since 1999*, while those involving cocaine and heroin have been steadily decreasing (see figure below). In 2002, more than one-third of the deaths examined in this study involved opioid analgesics, compared to 25.8% involving cocaine and 12.8% involving heroin. A breakdown of the opioid analgesic poisoning deaths for that year shows that more than half (54%) involved drugs such as codeine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and morphine while nearly one-third (32%) involved methadone. Relatively few (13%) involved the opioids fentanyl and meperidine (data not shown).

Percentage of U.S. Unintentional Drug Poisoning Deaths[†] from Opioid Analgesics, Cocaine, and Heroin, 1999 to 2002*



[†]For this study, unintentional drug poisoning deaths are those due to licit or illicit drug use, excluding alcohol, tobacco, and sedatives/psychotropic drugs. The drugs included in this analysis represented 92% of all unintentional drug poisoning deaths in 2002.

*Analysis was limited to 1999 to 2002 because prior to 1999 heroin and opioid analgesics were not distinguished.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Paulozzi, L.J., Budnitz, D.S., and Xi, Y. "Increasing Deaths from Opioid Analgesics in the United States," *Pharmacoepidemiology and Drug Safety* 15(9):613-617, 2006. For more information, contact Dr. Paulozzi at lbp4@cdc.gov.

•• 301-405-9770 (voice) •• 301-403-8342 (fax) •• CESAR@cesar.umd.edu •• www.cesar.umd.edu ••
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The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention funded this project under grant BJAG 2005-1206. All points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of any State agency.