

# Teen overdose deaths are spiking despite drug usage falling, study finds

April 14 2022, by Maria Jimenez Moya

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Despite teenage drug use being at an all time low, the number of teen overdose deaths has been rising for the past 10 years, a new study found.

Teenage overdose deaths in the United States more than doubled from 2010 to 2021, according to a peer-reviewed study published in JAMA on Tuesday.

Study author Joseph Friedman told USA TODAY the reason is that [illicit drugs](#) are becoming more lethal. For example, pills resembling Oxycodone, Percocet and Xanax are being laced with high levels of fentanyl, he said.

Teenagers "are not necessarily changing the practices. It's just that the drugs they've been buying and consuming for a long time have gotten way more dangerous," Friedman said.

The study found that between 2019 and 2021, teen fentanyl-involved overdoses increased from 253 to 884.

The only way to tell if a [drug](#) is laced with fentanyl is to use a fentanyl testing strip because illicit pills can look identical to the prescription ones, according to Friedman.

Teenage overdose deaths in the United States rose from 518 deaths in 2010 to 1,146 deaths in 2021. The highest rates were among Native American and Alaskan Native teens, followed by Latino teens.

"For the first time in history, as far as we can tell, teen overdose death rates are starting to spike precipitously," Friedman said.

Teenage drug usage remained the same between 2010 and 2020, with 30.2% and 30.4%, respectively, however as of 2021, there was a decline to 18.7%, according to the study.

The study, which used data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, calculated drug overdose deaths among teenagers ages

14 to 18.

"We're often used to thinking about overdose in the context of addiction, but really what we're talking about is just a teen kind of experimentation," said Friedman. "Drug use is, unfortunately, a very common part of being a teenager in the United States and because of that, we really need to equip teens with the knowledge they need to know to help their friends."

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Citation: Teen overdose deaths are spiking despite drug usage falling, study finds (2022, April 14) retrieved 11 February 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-teen-overdose-deaths-spiking-drug.html>

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