# U.S. Sees First Decrease in Overdose Deaths in Five Years



### U.S. Sees First Decrease in Overdose Deaths in Five Years

In 2023, the United States experienced a slight decline in drug overdose deaths for the first time in five years, according to preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). An estimated 107,500 people died from drug overdoses, a 3% decrease from the approximately 111,000 deaths in 2022.

Dr. Katherine Keyes from Columbia University described this slight reduction as "hopeful," marking a deviation from the increasing trends of the last few years. Overdose deaths had risen significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 30% spike from 2019 to 2020 and a further 15% rise in 2021.

The downturn in deaths is largely attributed to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, which were involved in nearly 70% of overdose fatalities. Despite the decrease, fentanyl continues to play a significant role in the crisis. In 2022, law enforcement officials seized over 115 million fentanyl-laced pills, up from around 71 million in 2022 and less than 50,000 in 2017.

Deaths from stimulants like cocaine and methamphetamine, however, showed increases. Methamphetamine-related deaths rose by 2%, and those involving cocaine increased by 5%.

State-level data presents a mixed picture. Overdose deaths decreased by at least 15% in states such as Nebraska, Kansas, and Indiana, while states in the western U.S., including Washington and Oregon, saw increases by more than 27%.

Experts note that the availability of naloxone, a life-saving drug that reverses opioid overdoses, and fentanyl test strips have contributed to the decline. In 2023 alone, 22 million doses of naloxone were distributed in the U.S. and Canada.

The CDC's data are provisional and subject to change as further reviews are conducted. Despite the overall reduction, overdose rates remain historically high, underscoring the continued need for comprehensive drug prevention and treatment efforts.