Number of Unintentional Opioid Analgesic Overdose Deaths Increases Fourfold Since 1999; Responsible for More Than Cocaine and Heroin Combined

The number of opioid analgesic deaths in the United States has nearly quadrupled over the past decade, according to data from the CDC’s National Vital Statistics System. There were 2,901 unintentional drug deaths involving opioid analgesics\(^1\) in 1999, compared to 11,499 in 2007 (the most recent year for which data are available). There were nearly twice as many deaths in 2007 involving opioid analgesics than deaths involving cocaine, and more than five times as many than those involving heroin. In fact, opioid analgesics have been responsible for more unintentional drug overdose deaths in the United States than cocaine and heroin combined since 2003. Unintentional drug overdoses deaths are the second leading cause of all unintentional deaths in the U.S., after motor vehicle-related deaths (see CESAR FAX, Volume 20, Issue 19).

Number of U.S. Unintentional Drug Overdose Deaths by Top Three Causes, 1999-2007

\(^1\)Opioid analgesics are categorized as methadone (ICD-10 code T40.3), other opioids (T40.2), and other synthetic narcotics (T40.4).