The US addiction crisis is in numbers

Washington

The United States is experiencing a drug addiction crisis of rare proportions. An estimated 2.6 million people are hooked on prescription opioid painkillers like oxycodone and hydrocodone, or on heroin and fentanyl, an extremely potent synthetic opioid. Here are some key facts:

- How many Americans are addicted to opioids?
  In 2015, an estimated two million Americans were addicted to prescription opioids like oxycodone, hydrocodone and 591,000 to heroin. But the tightening of supplies of prescription opioids has sent many opioid addicts moving to heroin. Heroin producers and dealers in turn are increasingly cutting their drug with fentanyl, which is so potent that a minuscule amount can turn a standard heroin dose deadly.

- How are prescription drugs and heroine use linked?
  Experts say four out of five US heroin users started with prescription opioids and fentanyl, an extremely potent synthetic opioid. A new study ties the likelihood of addiction to the amount and strength of the opioid painkiller first prescribed by a doctor. Patients who are given a prescription lasting more than three days, or who get a second prescription, or who are prescribed longer-lasting painkillers, are significantly more likely to be using the drug a year later.

- How many people are dying from opioid overdoses?
  The latest US data show that in 2015, 33,091 people died from opioid overdoses, up from 17,000 in 2014, according to the Centers for Disease Control, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

- Which states have the highest levels of overdose deaths?
  The national average for opioid overdose deaths in 2015 was 10 for every 100,000 people. In West Virginia, the figure was 41.5 per 100,000; New Hampshire, 34.3 per 100,000; Kentucky and Ohio, 29.9 per 100,000; and Rhode Island, 28.2 per 100,000. Nineteen of 50 states saw significant increases in overdose deaths that year.

- Data from the Centers for Disease Control, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the American Society of Addiction Medicine.