



## Jackson County Department of Public Health

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### LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Prescription opioids are highly addictive medications used to treat moderate-to-severe pain. They are often prescribed after an injury or surgery, even with their known extreme risks. One in four patients who receive long-term opioid therapy with a professional's oversight still struggles with opioid addiction. Anyone who takes prescription opioids is at risk of becoming addicted to them.

Taking too many prescription opioids can lead to death by stopping a person from breathing. The most common drugs involved in overdose deaths include methadone, oxycodone and hydrocodone. Many also involve benzodiazepines, which are central nervous system depressants.

As healthcare systems and providers have started working towards better prescribing practices in response to the opioid epidemic, many people struggling with an opioid dependence have turned to heroin as a cheaper alternative. Heroin is illegal and highly addictive and can cause slow breathing, coma, and death. Since 2019, heroin involved overdose deaths have increased nearly 5 times in the U.S.

A synthetic opioid pain reliever, pharmaceutical fentanyl, is approved for treating severe pain. It is extremely potent and has been misused in the United States. However, illegally made fentanyl is most often related to harm, overdose, and death here in the U.S. It is often mixed with other illegal substances and the person using may not always be aware of the mixture. Reports from law enforcement indicate that the synthetic opioid overdose death increases may be due to illegal fentanyl.

The opioid epidemic continues to devastate our nation, state, and local community. It is greatly impacting our families, from infancy to elderly adults caring for their grandchildren. The Health Department will continue to spotlight the opioid epidemic throughout the month, as County Commissioners declared September as Opioid Awareness Month. For more information or to get involved, contact Janelle Messer at (828) 587-8238 or [janellemesser@jacksonnc.org](mailto:janellemesser@jacksonnc.org).

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