



CDC reports spike in heroin deaths

By Elise Viebeck - 01/13/15 01:33 PM EST

Deaths linked to heroin overdoses jumped 39 percent between 2012 and 2013, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) — a significant uptick that has public health experts worried.

A total of 8,257 people died due to heroin use in 2013 compared with 5,925 in 2012, the CDC reported Monday. The surge in fatalities came amid an overall increase in overdose deaths, which rose from 41,340 to 43,982.

"These troubling statistics illustrate a grim reality: that drug, and particularly opioid abuse, represents a growing public health crisis," Attorney General Eric Holder said in a statement.

The trend was attributed to tighter controls on prescription opioids that pushed users to find cheaper, illicit alternatives. Prescription drug abuse is considered to be at epidemic levels in the United States.

The CDC reported last year that deaths from heroin overdoses doubled between 2010 and 2012 in the 28 states where data was available.

The shift toward heroin may also have roots in the decriminalization of marijuana around the country.

Mexican drug traffickers are increasingly pushing heroin across the southern border, as American marijuana users switch to weed grown in the United States. Drug enforcement officials seized 2,181 kilograms of heroin in 2014, according to *The Washington Post* — almost three times the amount seized in 2009.

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