

Opioid addiction treatment is increasing, except in the young

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An analysis of national data on buprenorphine use found that treatment with the FDA-approved medication for opioid addiction is increasing in all age groups except the young (age 15-24 years), in whom use of the medication is decreasing.

The findings were published in *JAMA*.

"While it's encouraging to see an overall increase in prescription rates for buprenorphine, the data suggest that the youngest group is having difficulty accessing this potentially lifesaving treatment," says the study's leader Mark Olfson, MD, MPH, the Elizabeth K. Dollard Professor of Psychiatry, Medicine, and Law at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

The study is the first to evaluate national trends in buprenorphine treatment.

Over the study period, annual rates of buprenorphine use more than doubled—from 1.97 per 1,000 people in 2009 to 4.43 per 1,000 people in 2018.

While increases in buprenorphine use varied among different [age groups](#), medication use decreased by around 20% in the youngest group, from 1.76 to 1.40 per 1,000 people. Compared with older peers, treatment duration and prescription strength were also lower for this age group.

"These findings for young people are particularly worrisome, given that their decrease in buprenorphine treatment occurred during a period when there was an increase in opioid-related overdose deaths for this age group," says Olfson.

The researchers note that although overall rates of buprenorphine use are on the rise, they are still lower than national estimates of those with opioid use disorder (including prescription opioids and heroin).

"Our results highlight the critical need to improve buprenorphine treatment services, especially for the youngest with [opioid](#) use disorder," says Olfson.

The article is titled, "Trends in [buprenorphine](#) treatment in the United States, 2009-2018."

Provided by Columbia University Irving Medical Center

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