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Increased heroin use in Alaska leads to more deaths and hospitalizations
State epidemiology report shows dramatic rise in heroin health impacts and treatment costs

ANCHORAGE — Deaths associated with heroin use in Alaska more than tripled from 2008–2013 and inpatient hospitalizations doubled over the same time period, according to an Epidemiology Bulletin release by the Department of Health and Social Services today.

“The drastic increase in opioid pain reliever use over the past two decades has created ‘opioid hunger,’” said Jay Butler, M.D., Chief Medical Officer for the Department of Health and Social Services. “Combined with the influx of cheap and available heroin, this has created a perfect storm of heroin addiction and deaths.”

Alaska’s Epidemiology Bulletin: Health Impacts of Heroin Use (http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/rr2015_01.pdf) includes Alaska data and recommendations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a national report on heroin use last week: [CDC Vital Signs heroin use report](#).

“To reverse these troubling trends,” Butler said, “we need to effectively treat addiction as a chronic disease, increase the opportunities to provide life-saving reversal of heroin overdose using naloxone, and reduce addiction by preventing inappropriate prescriptions and diversions of opioid pain relievers.”

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