Use and misuse of prescription pain relievers among Kentucky adults

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), opioids, including prescription drugs, are the most common cause of drug overdose deaths. Currently, Kentucky is ranked fifth for overdose deaths with a rate of 34 per 100,000 people. This rate has risen in recent years.\(^1\) \(^2\)

The 2017 Kentucky Health Issues Poll (KHIP) asked Kentucky adults about the use and misuse of prescription drugs. KHIP is sponsored by Interact for Health and the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky.

**1 IN 3 KENTUCKY ADULTS WERE PRESCRIBED PAIN RELIEVERS**

KHIP asked, “During the past five years has a doctor, dentist or other medical professional prescribed a pain reliever for you that you could not purchase ‘over the counter’ such as OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet or codeine?” One in 3 Kentucky adults (34%) reported that they had been prescribed a pain reliever at some point in the last five years. This is lower than

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\(^1\)The drug overdose death rate in Kentucky was 25 per 100,000 in 2014 and 30 per 100,000 in 2015.


These findings, unless otherwise noted, are from the Kentucky Health Issues Poll, funded by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky and Interact for Health. The Kentucky Health Issues Poll was conducted Oct. 24-Dec. 2, 2017, by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati. A random sample of 1,692 adults from throughout Kentucky was interviewed by telephone. This included 861 landline interviews and 831 cell phone interviews with cell phone users. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to ±2.4%. There are other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as nonresponse, question wording, or context effects that can introduce error or bias. For more information about the Kentucky Health Issues Poll, please visit www.healthy-ky.org or www.interactforhealth.org/kentucky-health-issues-poll.
in 2011, when more than half of Kentucky adults (55%) reported that they had been prescribed such a pain reliever within the last five years. Answers to this question varied by region in 2017. (See map on first page.)

**OPINIONS ABOUT AMOUNT OF PAIN PILLS PRESCRIBED**

KHIP asked the 34% of Kentucky adults who reported being prescribed prescription pain relievers in the past five years, “Thinking about the most recent time a doctor, dentist or other medical professional prescribed a pain reliever for you, did you feel they prescribed more pills than you needed to control your pain, less pills than you needed to control your pain or the right amount of pills you needed to control your pain?” This question was also asked on KHIP in 2011.

In 2017, 2 in 10 Kentucky adults (21%) were prescribed pain drugs in the past five years and felt they received the right amount of pills. This compares with 7% of Kentucky adults who were prescribed pain drugs in the past five years and thought they received too many pills, and 6% who thought they received too few pills. (See graph on first page.)

**1 IN 4 KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS ABUSED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS**

KHIP asked, “Have any of your family members or friends experienced problems as a result of abusing prescription pain relievers such as OxyContin, Vicodin, Percocet, or codeine?” Nearly 1 in 4 Kentucky adults (24%) reported that they had a friend or family member who has experienced problems as a result of prescription pain relievers. This has remained stable in recent years.

Percentage of adults reporting that they had family members or friends who had experienced problems as a result of abusing prescription drugs

![Graph showing percentage of adults reporting family members or friends who experienced problems with prescription drugs from 2011 to 2017.](image)

SOURCE: 2017 Kentucky Health Issues Poll (released April 2018)