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## How the drug overdose epidemic varies by age

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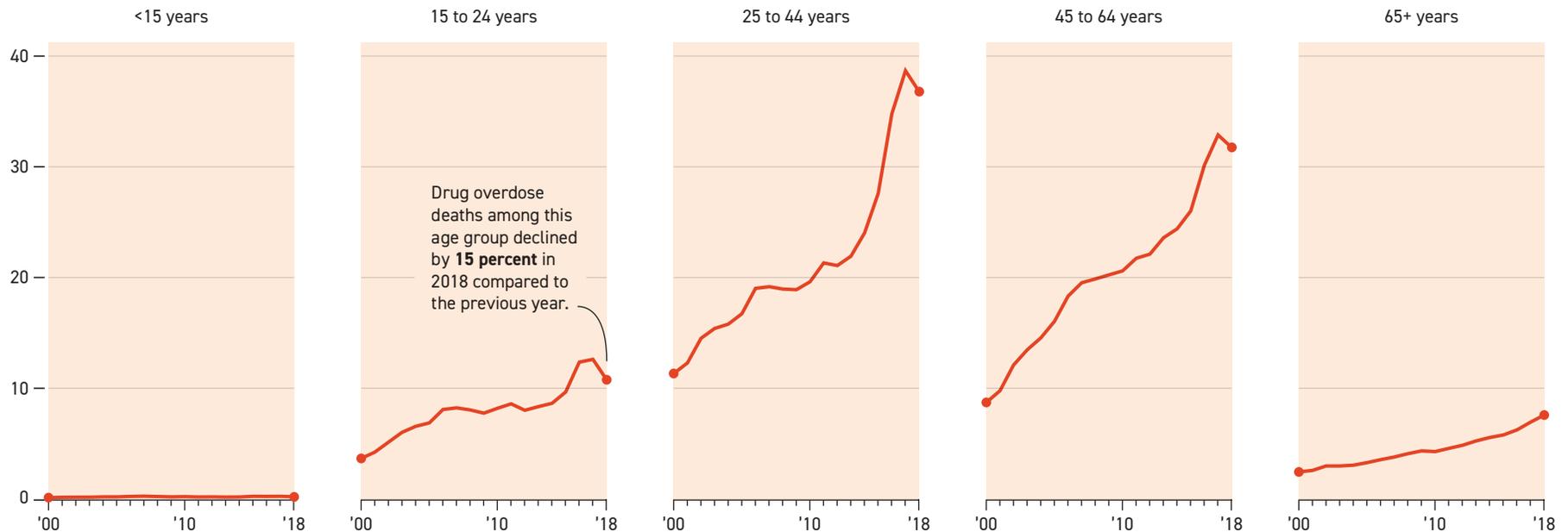
The number of overdose deaths in the U.S. declined significantly in 2018, with every age group except seniors above age 65 experiencing significant declines. The youngest age brackets saw the largest reductions.

The overdose epidemic has proceeded in several distinct phases, with varying effects on different age groups. Initially, when the epidemic was largely caused by prescription opioid overdoses in the early 2000s, deaths were most common among middle-aged adults between 45 and 64 years old.

Later, as the black market shifted to illicit opioids such as heroin and fentanyl in the 2010s, the mortality rate climbed fastest for younger age groups.

### Drug overdose deaths declined in 2018, particularly among young adults

Drug overdose death rate per 100,000 population by age group, 2000 to 2018



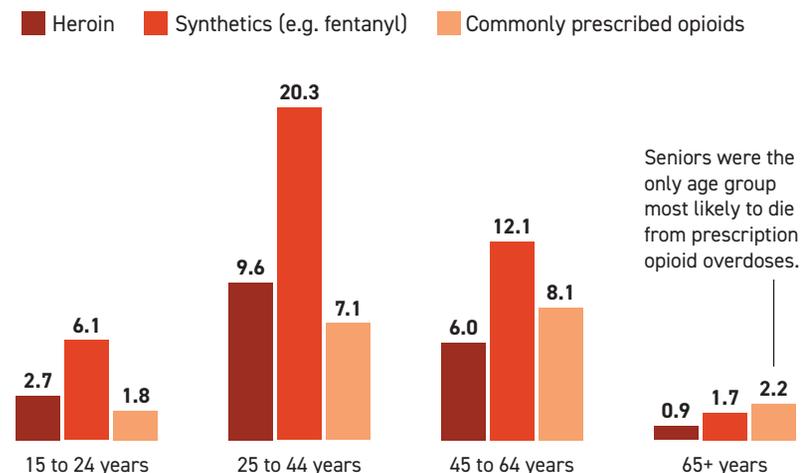
The relationship between age and drug overdose type can be seen in the most recent year of cause-of-death data, shown to the right.

For young adults, heroin and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl — drugs commonly obtained on the black market — are much deadlier than prescription opioids. This is caused in part by higher rates of recreational illicit drug use in this age group.

For Americans ages 65 and older, prescription opioids continue to be the most common cause of drug overdose deaths. However, even among this age group, the combined total for heroin and synthetic opioid overdose deaths is greater than prescription opioids.

### Illicit drugs cause most youth overdose deaths

Drug overdose death rate per 100,000 population by age group, by drug type, 2018



Seniors were the only age group most likely to die from prescription opioid overdoses.