Global Opioid Production Has Hit Record Highs, U.N. World Drug Report Warns

The 2018 annual survey also shows prescription drug abuse is expanding and opioid-related deaths are on the rise.

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This week, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released its latest World Drug Report warning that global opioid production has hit record highs. The annual survey also shows prescription drug abuse is expanding and opioid-related deaths are on the rise, according to a recent press release from the department.

According to the report, nonmedical use of prescription drugs is becoming a major threat to public health and law enforcement across the globe. Opioids are causing the most harm, accounting for 76 percent of drug-use related deaths. The study also reports that global opium production has jumped by 65 percent to 10,500 tons this year, the highest-ever recorded estimate by the UNODC since it started tracking opioid production in the early 2000s.

What's more, the global seizure of pharmaceutical opioids has hit roughly the same as quantities of heroin seized by law enforcement officials every year. Fentanyl is one of the biggest illegally sold opioids, while tramadol (an opioid used to treat moderate to severe pain) has become a growing concern in parts of Asia and Africa.

Global cocaine manufacture also hit a record high: 1,410 tons were produced this year. Meanwhile, the number of people worldwide using drugs at least once a year has remained steady, with about 275 million people, or roughly 5.6 percent of the world's population, partaking in illegal consumption. Cannabis, which has been legalized in many places over the past few years, remains the most widely consumed drug on earth, with 192 million people reporting use over the past year.

The UNODC report also shows that drug-related deaths are on the rise, increasing by nearly 60 percent from 2000 to 2015. Older drug users appear to be at greatest risk, with about three quarters of drug-related deaths occurring among opioid users age 50 or older.

For the U.N.'s complete findings and to learn what they mean for global drug prevention and enforcement efforts, click here.

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