

Opioid misuse taking toll on farming communities.

Three out of every four farmers are or have been impacted by opioid misuse — either by having a friend or family member addicted, having taken an illegal opioid, or having dealt with addiction themselves. In many cases, opioid misuse on farms often begins unintentionally.

Farming is a hazardous occupation, but when farmers get hurt, they can't give up a month to recover. Therefore, they are more likely to be prescribed an opioid. Their desire to get back on the farm is often noble, but repeated misuse of prescription opioids can lead to addiction.

Farmers are facing turbulent times. Farmers are resilient, and most people are not aware of the stress farmers face.

One of the critical steps in preventing opioid misuse is properly storing and disposing of prescription medication. 70% of people of those who misuse prescription drugs say they got them from a friend or family member. Proper prescription drug disposal ensures drugs won't fall into the wrong hands.

Always keep pain medicine in a secure place. Please don't leave it in a bathroom or kitchen cabinet where anyone can find it. Don't share your medicine with anyone, even a family member.

Take medicine only as long as you have to. As soon as you get by with over-the-counter pain relievers, stop taking the prescription pain medicine.

If there are still pills left over, remove them from the house. Turn in leftover prescription medication to a secure "take-back" box. Find a take-back box near you at bit.ly/Take-Back-Box.

Another critical step to prevention — talking about substance misuse.

Don't be afraid to talk about it. Especially in families with a history of misuse, please talk about this with your children when they reach the appropriate age.

As of March 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention noted that drug overdose death rates continue to rise in rural and urban areas. In five states, California, Connecticut, North Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia, drug-overdose deaths in rural counties were higher than in urban counties. In addition, a December 2017 survey by the National Farmers Union and the American Farm Bureau Federation found that the opioid crisis has directly impacted as many as 74 percent of farmers.

The opioid epidemic is devastating to its victims and their families. It has a compounding ripple effect throughout communities, affecting the quality of life, economic opportunity, and rural prosperity. No corner of our country has gone untouched by the opioid crisis, but the impact of this issue on small towns and rural places has been particularly significant.

Resources:

<https://opioidmisusetool.norc.org/>

<https://www.ruralcommunitytoolbox.org/assets/3664-15201/federal-rural-resource-guide.pdf>

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-community-action-guide.pdf>

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-community-action-guide-promising-practices.pdf>

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rd-opioid-misuse-funding.pdf>

SOURCE: USDA and Farm Progress