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## Take Two

# LA's heroin problem is hitting millennials hard

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*Jae C. Hong/AP*

FILE - In this Monday, May 6, 2013 file photo, a drug addict prepares a needle to inject himself with heroin in front of a church in the Skid Row area of Los Angeles. It's not a rare scene on Skid Row to spot addicts using drugs in the open, even when police patrol the area. Jim Hall, an epidemiologist who studies substance abuse at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. says, the striking thing about heroin's most recent incarnation in the early 21st Century, is that a drug that was once largely confined to major cities is spreading into suburban and rural towns across America, where it is used predominantly by young adults between the ages of 18 and 29. "We haven't really seen something this rapid since probably the spread of cocaine and crack in the mid-1980s," Hall said. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



## Emergency room trips doubled for young heroin users between 2010 and 2016.

[New data](#) from California officials is shining a light on heroin use in the Los Angeles area, particularly among young people.

The number of L.A. millennials admitted for overdoses to emergency rooms doubled between the first nine months of 2010 and the same period in 2016.

It's a reality that addiction counselor Jody Waxman faces every day.

"Heroin is easy to get," Waxman says. "You have these young kids who are trying to get rid of the emotional pain and trauma that they've had in their lives and the way that they deal with it is to use and get high."

For years, heroin was seen as a drug of the inner cities, but that's changed. Waxman herself is a case in point.

Three years ago, Waxman and her family were living a middle-class life in the San Fernando Valley. She was active in a [parental support group](#) for families struggling with issues like addiction. Then, one day her son called her and made a confession:

"I got a call before the group started that said, 'Mom, I'm a heroin addict, and I need help,'" Waxman says. "It was pretty surprising. My kid was 22 years old, and I had no idea."

Waxman says the signs were there, but it took her some time to see them. Her son's addiction led her to become a certified addiction counselor. She now works with parents who find themselves in the same position.

When asked about the rise of heroin use in California, Waxman points the finger at doctors.

"I'm glad that you can't get the pain medications that you were getting before — that they've put a stop to that — but I think that doctors have really gotten people hooked on that pain medication and now that they can't get it on a regular basis, they have to go toward something else," she says.

That "something else" is heroin. Most of it flows into the U.S. from south of the border or



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her doubtful that the problem will ever get solved unless parents change their approach.

"Are we ever going to stop the heroin? No, I don't think so," Waxman says. "But are we going to be able to educate parents to help their child understand that if you do it one time you can become addicted to it?"

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