As prescription painkillers become more difficult to obtain and abuse, a growing number of people addicted to these drugs are switching to heroin, USA Today recently reported.

The trend is increasingly being seen in the suburbs.

Health officials and police report a significant rise in overdoses and crime, the newspaper notes. Last fall, the Northern New England Poison Center reported a jump in heroin overdoses in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire. "When you switch to heroin, you don't know what's in there from batch to batch," said the center's director, Karen Simone. "It's a big jump to go to heroin. It may be strong; it may be weak. They don't know what they are getting. Suddenly, the whole game changes."

Heroin is popular in large part because it is cheap, officials say. While an 80-milligram OxyContin costs between $60 to $100 a pill on the black market, heroin costs $45 to $60 for a multiple-dose supply. OxyContin abuse has also been declining because the drug has been reformulated so it is more difficult to crush and snort.

According to the 2011 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the number of people who were past-year heroin users in 2011 (620,000) was higher than the number in 2007 (373,000). "Heroin is huge. We've never had anything like it in this state," said Carol Falkowski, the former drug abuse strategy officer for Minnesota and a member of the Community Epidemiology Working Group at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which tracks trends in drug use. "It's very affordable. It's very high purity. Most people did not believe that heroin would happen here in Lake Woebegone, but it really has a grip, not only in the Twin Cities, but all around the state."

Drugs, legal and illegal, are consumed across cultures, and are used for a wide variety of reasons, including, in the case of prescription drugs, to promote health. However, illegal drugs play a very different role in our society and the effect they have those who use them.

Besides alcohol, our number one drug, some of the most commonly abused drugs include: marijuana, amphetamines, methamphetamine, barbiturates, cocaine, methaqualone, opium alkaloids, synthetic opioids, benzodiazepines, including flunitrazepam (Rohypnol), gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), phencyclidine, methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, ecstasy), ketamine, anabolic steroids and a host of legal prescription drugs.

Click here for a grater understanding of drugs and drug dependence.