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REAL-TIME NEWS FROM BIRMINGHAM

## Birmingham files lawsuit against 3 of the largest drug wholesalers in U.S.

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Birmingham Mayor William Bell (Roy S. Johnson)

The city of Birmingham on Monday filed a federal lawsuit against three of the country's largest wholesale drug distributors - Cardinal Health, AmerisourceBergen and McKesson - in an effort to fight the prescription opioid epidemic.

Mayor William Bell said these three companies are responsible for the proliferation of prescription drugs in the city's neighborhoods. He said the drug wholesalers are refusing to fulfill their obligations to monitor, identify, report and halt suspicious shipments of opioids.

"As in other cities across the state, the opioid epidemic has been taking the lives of our young people and destroying families throughout our communities," Bell said in a statement. "When it comes to helping all that are affected by this devastating problem, providing solutions must be our top priority."

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court in Birmingham.

"We've got to cut off the ability that makes it so easy to get access to opioids," Bell said at a Monday morning press conference.

According to the city, Congress put Wholesale Distributors in a position of trust as gatekeepers responsible for halting suspicious orders and controlling against the diversion of the drugs to illegitimate uses.

The companies have failed in to their duties, though and have profited from a flood of pills into our community, the mayor said.

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According to a release from the city, the companies control 85 percent of the market for prescription opioids and are profiting from the opioid epidemic. And in the last few years, the big three wholesale distributors have paid over \$200 million in fines for the same conduct covered in the complaint.

A 2012 study showed Alabama had the highest level of prescription opioid use in the nation.

Doctors in the state wrote 5.8 million prescriptions for pain pills in 2015, according to the Centers for Disease Control. That amounts to about 1.2 prescriptions per person (compared to the national average of 0.71).

According to the city, the opioid epidemic is creating pressure on health care facilities, municipal courts, fire departments and law enforcement agencies, resulting in rising costs, a strain on resources, and concerns about public safety.

"It has only grown worse as people who were addicted to prescription pills have, thanks to heightened enforcement efforts, found them harder to come by," Birmingham Police Chief A.C. Roper said in a statement. "The residents of Birmingham and the city's infrastructure bear the burden of the cost of the epidemic, as the costs of treatment for addiction, education and law enforcement have continued to rise and opioid addicts have turned to street drugs like heroin and fentanyl."

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Opioid abuse is now the leading cause of death for those under 50. In Jefferson County alone, more than 200 people died from overdoses of heroin or fentanyl in 2016, according to the coroner's office, more than double the previous year. In addition to the cost in human life, researchers estimate the total economic burden of the prescription opioid epidemic at \$78.5 billion.

[Birmingham Opioid Lawsuit](#) by [KentFaulk](#) on Scribd

