

Science & Health

Drug Companies Reach \$215 Million Settlement in US Opioid Case

By VOA News

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Summit county executive Ilene Shapiro speaks to the media outside the U.S. Federal courthouse, Oct. 21, 2019, in Cleveland.

A major pharmaceutical company and three of the biggest drug distributors in the U.S. have reached a \$260 million settlement with two counties in Ohio to avoid a trial over their role in the deadly opioid addiction crisis gripping America.

The deal, struck Monday, came just hours before the opening arguments in a court in Cleveland, Ohio. The case has been viewed as a harbinger for similar lawsuits filed by more than 2,700 local and state governments across the country in hopes of recouping damages from the crisis.

Drug distributors McKesson, Cardinal Health and AmerisourceBergen will pay \$215 million in reparations. Israeli drug manufacturer Teva will pay \$20 million in cash and also contribute \$25 million worth of Suboxone, used to treat opioid addiction.

"People can't lose sight of the fact that the counties got a very good deal for themselves, but we also set an important national benchmark for the others," said Hunter Shkolnik, a lawyer for Cuyahoga County.

Cuyahoga and Summit counties had brought the lawsuit that accused the four companies of fueling a nationwide opioid crisis.

According to U.S. government data, opioids have led to some 400,000 overdose deaths between 1997 and 2017.

Lawyers say the settlement will provide local governments with the finances needed to establish opioid-recovery programs.

Attempts to reach a nationwide settlement broke down last week after cities and counties suing the drug companies rejected an offer of \$48 billion in cash, treatment drugs and services.

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