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Side effects seen from bone-building drugs

LOS ANGELES, April 4 (UPI) -- More than 2,400 U.S. residents taking bisphosphonate drugs to build their bones have suffered bone damage to their jaws since 2001, a report said.

Aside from the 2,400, who were taking mainly the more potent injected form of bisphosphonates, 120 people taking the oral form of the drugs also have reported debilitating problems.

While that number is small vs. the estimated 39 million oral bisphosphonate prescriptions handed out in 2005 to treat osteoporosis and cancer victims, health experts told The Los Angeles Times the problems may show a trend.

"We've uncovered about 1,000 patients (with jaw necrosis) in the past six to nine months alone, so the magnitude of the problem is just starting to be recognized," Kenneth Hargreaves of the University of Texas told the newspaper.

Bisphosphonates include brands such as Actonel, Fosamax and Boniva.

"We're not quite sure what we're dealing with over the long haul. Side effects like this should make ordinary, healthy women think twice," said Dr. Susan Ott of the University of Washington.