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Sharing Medication Among Teenage Girls: Potential Danger to Unplanned/Undiagnosed Pregnancies

Katherine Lyon-Daniel, Margaret A. Honein, and Cynthia Moore

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Medication sharing among adolescent girls is a concern because of the potential for causing birth defects in an unplanned or unrecognized pregnancy. A number of factors contribute to this concern, including the relatively common use of prescription drugs among children and adolescents.

What are the findings of this study?

A total of 19.7% of girls and 13.4% of boys reported ever borrowing or sharing medications. Of the girls surveyed, 15.7% reported sharing their prescription medications with others, and 14.5% reported borrowing someone else's prescription medication. The reported likelihood of sharing increased with age. Medication sharing or borrowing for many girls was not a "one time only" emergency use: 7.3% of girls 15 through 18 years of age shared medications more than three times. The reasons girls gave for why they *would* share medications included: having a prescription for the same medicine (40.2%), getting the medication from a family member (33.4%), having the same problem as the person who had the medication (29%), or wanting something strong for pimples or oily skin (10.5%).

How was the information gathered?

Data were collected as part of Youthstyles (conducted by DDB Needham and Associates), a mail survey of children and adolescents nine through 18 years of age (764 girls and 804 boys) about health issues, attitudinal variables, and media preferences. Information collected by the survey included the respondent's history of borrowing or sharing prescription medications, the frequency with which sharing occurred, the reasons why medications might be borrowed or shared, and who influences their decisions to borrow or share medication.

What do these findings suggest?

Medication sharing is relatively common among children and adolescents, and it is more common among girls than boys. A teen who receives a medication via sharing does not receive the appropriate information about its actions and possible negative interactions with other medications, or any other associated risks. Sharing drugs that could possibly cause birth defects is of special concern. Many barriers exist to communicating the risk about these drugs to women and girls; particularly if they are not planning a pregnancy or are unaware that they are already pregnant. These findings suggest that basic research on issues related to the dangers of medication sharing, and risks associated with certain drugs potentially causing birth defects and other adverse health events, needs to be conducted. Successful approaches to communicating these risks need to be developed.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ncbddd

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