

Ad Spotlights Teen Abuse of Medicinal Drugs

How hard is it for your teen to get high on prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs? It's easier than you may think.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that more than half of teens who abuse prescription pain relievers say they get them for free, from the homes of family or friends. Many times, teens simply take the drugs without asking.

That's why parents are the target audience of an awareness program run by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). The program involves FDA and 10 other private and government organizations, and focuses on illegal use of "legal" medicinal drugs.

Risky Behavior

"Parents need to know the trends regarding teens and drug abuse," says Ellen Shapiro, Public Affairs Director for FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, "and that abuse of over-the-counter and prescription medicine can be as harmful as using illicit drugs."

She adds, "They also need to help their teens know about the risks involved with this type of drug abuse. Teens who use these drugs to get high can run the risk of addiction, strokes, seizures, comas, and even death."

Last year, an annual University of Michigan survey on adolescent drug use confirmed that teen use of prescription drugs for nonmedicinal purposes remains steady and relatively high, even as teen use of illicit drugs and alcohol has steadily

declined.

The survey of 50,000 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in more than 400 schools nationwide showed that Oxycontin and Vicodin were prevalent among teen abusers. It also found that 1 in every 14 12th graders—and 1 in every 25 8th graders—abused cough or cold medications fairly recently.

Exposing Easy Access

The centerpiece of the latest awareness program is an ad that highlights the ease with which teens can find prescription and OTC medicines to abuse.

Titled "Is This Where Your Teen Goes to Get High?", the ad shows a photo of an open medicine cabinet and states that often-abused drugs "are most likely already in your own home."

The spot ran this spring in local and national newspapers, including *USA Today* and *The New York Times*—and in national magazines such as *People*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time*, *TV Guide*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*.

Joining FDA and ONDCP in the ad campaign are SAMHSA and the

IS THIS WHERE YOUR TEEN GOES TO GET HIGH?



A growing danger among teens today is the intentional abuse of prescription drugs and over-the-counter cough and cold medicines to get high.

One cause of the problem is how easily teens can find them. These drugs are most likely already in your own home. Over half of teens who abuse prescription pain relievers report they get them for free from the homes of family or friends, or they take them from family or friends without asking.¹

Most frightening, however, is that teens often don't recognize the dangers of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse; they don't see it to be as harmful as illicit drug use. After all, these drugs are approved for medical use. But when taken without medical supervision, intentionally abused, or mixed with other drugs or alcohol, prescription medicines can be dangerous. Teens who decide to abuse prescription drugs run the risk of addiction, strokes, seizures, comas, and even death.

Unfortunately, it's a growing trend. Teens are turning away from using street drugs to prescription medications to get high. New users of prescription drugs are actually catching up with new users of marijuana.²

The first step for parents is to recognize the potential risks and consequences of prescription drug abuse, and to help teens understand them as well. Learn the signs, symptoms, and tips on how to talk to your teens about prescription drug abuse. **Educate yourself to protect your teens:** visit www.TheAntiDrug.com or call 1-800-788-2800.

Overall, teen use of street drugs is down. That's great; that means you've been doing your job. Now it's time to make sure that you stay updated on this latest threat to your teens' health and safety.

Signed,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Emergency Physicians
American Medical Association
American Pharmacists Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Association for Medical Education
and Research in Substance Abuse (AMERSA)

National Association of Chain Drug Stores
National Association of School Nurses
National Council on Patient Information and Education
Partnership for a Drug-Free America
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Institute on Drug Abuse
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
U.S. Food and Drug Administration



www.TheAntiDrug.com

1 SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2004
2 2004

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National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

Other participating organizations include

- The American Academy of Pediatrics
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- The American Medical Association
- American Pharmacists Association
- The American Society of Addiction Medicine

“The buzz takes your breath away ... Permanently. Misuse of prescription pain relievers can kill you” reads one. “It’s to die for,” states another.

- The Association for Medical Education and Research in Substance Abuse (AMERSA)
- The National Association of Chain Drug Stores
- The National Association of School Nurses
- The National Council on Patient Information and Education
- The Partnership for a Drug-Free America

The parent-awareness initiative, which is part of ONDCP’s National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, compliments another effort led by SAMHSA and FDA aiming to increase awareness of the overall prescription drug abuse problem. That campaign, which is already in its third year, also involves the NIDA and the ONDCP.

Campaign-related ads and posters previously released by FDA also feature stark messages. “The buzz takes your breath away ... Permanently,” and “Misuse of prescription pain relievers can kill you” reads one. “It’s to die for,” states another. (A main message of this ad is: It starts with “just this once,” and it can end there.)

“All of the ads are available online for download,” says Shapiro. “They can be printed and posted by individuals, groups, schools, and anyone else who may be interested. There’s even an editable version available that will allow organizations to customize the ad with their name and logo.”

The printable ads, as well as access to the downloadable public-service announcements for radio and television, can be found at www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/misuse_RX_all_resources.htm

What Parents Can Do

ONDCP’s popular and effective “Parents: The Anti-Drug” campaign has listed the following tips for parents on its Web site (www.theantidrug.com) aimed at stopping teen abuse of prescription and OTC drugs.

Educate yourself and your teen about the risks. Prescription drugs can be just as dangerous and as addictive as “street drugs” and can be lethal. Talk to your teen about the dangers of these drugs.

Keep track of quantities. Take note of how many pills are in a bottle or pill packet and ask other households your teen visits to do the same. Don’t forget about refills. If you find you have to refill medication for a chronic condition more often than recommended, someone may be knowingly stealing your medication.

Talk to friends, relatives and school administration. Make sure your friends and relatives know about the risks too, and encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets. If you don’t know the parents of your child’s circle of friends, make an effort to get to know them, and get on the same page about rules and expectations. Follow up with your teen’s school administration to find out what they are doing to address issues of prescription and OTC drug abuse on campus.

Follow directions carefully. Make sure you and your teen use prescription drugs only as prescribed by a medical doctor and take only the recommended dosages as indicated for both prescription and OTC drugs.

Discard old or unused medications.

Unused prescription drugs should be disposed of in the trash. Unless the directions say otherwise, do NOT flush medications down the drain or toilet because the chemicals can taint the water supply. Also, remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away.

Monitor your teen’s time online. Check browser histories and set a time limit for how long your teen can be online.

Be observant. If you find your teen is quickly going through cough syrup, or you find empty bottles and pill packages among your child’s personal effects, talk with him or her, listen carefully, and determine if there is a problem. If there is a problem, call your family physician immediately.

Help your teen find other ways to relieve stress and have fun. Many teens point to personal and family stress, as well as boredom, as reasons they abuse prescription and OTC drugs. Help your teen find other ways to relieve pressures, for example through positive activities that interest him or her, positive friendships, or by simply listening and offering guidance. Also, help your teen find constructive ways to pass time, and set a good example yourself. [FDA](#)