

The Lethal Truth About Your Medicine Cabinet: Teens Are Using Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs to Get High

Across the U.S. teens are getting a new high. From family medicine cabinets or the drugstore, medicines designed to treat cold symptoms, provide pain relief or treat attention deficit disorder are being used to get high. This misuse involves [prescription drugs](#) such as opioids (Vicodin,[®] [OxyContin[®]](#)), antidepressants (Valium,[®] Xanax[®]) and stimulants ([Ritalin[®]](#), Adderall[®]). Teens are also getting high from common [over-the-counter drugs](#), particularly cold medicines with dextromethorphan (DXM) as a main ingredient. This is sometimes referred to as “pharming” and “robotripping.”

What are some of the consequences of misusing prescription or over-the-counter drugs?

The [consequences](#) for prescription drug abuse include respiratory distress, cardiac stress and seizures (all of which can lead to death), tolerance (meaning that you have to take more of the drug to achieve the desired effect), dependence and serious withdrawal symptoms. Among teens, pain medication is the most abused prescription medication. Misuse of dextromethorphan (DXM) can cause nausea, vomiting, seizures, hallucinations and even death.

Could my teen be misusing prescription or OTC drugs?

Nearly one-third of all drug abuse in the U.S. involves non-medical misuse of prescription drugs. More worrisome, 13.4 percent of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 have misused prescription drugs at least once. (*2003 NSDUH, Table 1.2B*) To counter the growing problem of prescription drug misuse, parents are urged to learn the signs and symptoms of using these drugs, to talk to their kids about the dangers, and to intervene if they see a problem.

Why are teens misusing prescription and OTC drugs?

Teens often point to personal or family-related [stress](#) as a major reason why they misuse prescription and over-the-counter drugs. Sources of stressful feelings for teens may include anxiety about friendships, romantic relationships and family life; worry about academic success, high school tests or college entrance exams; or trouble balancing homework, after-school jobs and extracurricular activities.

What can I do to help my teen?

Research shows parents’ attitudes about drug use directly affect their kids’ decisions. Talk to your teens and set clear expectations. Let them know you don’t want them to get high. Monitor their behavior for [warning signs](#). Get to know their friends and their friends’ families. Keep your prescription and other medications in a place where only you have access to them and ask your teen’s grandparents to do the same.

This article is brought to you by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. For more information about prescription and over-the-counter drug misuse among teens and keeping your teen drug-free, visit www.TheAntiDrug.com, or www.MediaCampaign.org.

