

Summer sense campaign: The new party drugs

Army Substance Abuse Program Release

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Prescription medication abuse by teens and young adults is a serious problem in the United States.

- 1 in 5 teens has abused a prescription pain medication
- 1 in 5 report abusing prescription stimulants and tranquilizers
- 1 in 10 has abused cough medication

Why is this increase in teenage prescription and OTC drug abuse happening now?

Awareness and access. Mainly for good reasons, our society is very familiar—and more and more comfortable—with prescription pharmaceuticals and OTC medicines. Products come to market, their images advertised in newspapers, magazines, and on television and the Internet, with educational programs to raise our understanding of the conditions they treat. Many new drugs replace older ones with safer and more effective formulations.

Caught in the Web

Then there's the Internet, which has been at the center of an explosion of information of all kinds, good and bad. You can find useful information on the Web about the risks from the nonmedical, recreational use of prescription and OTC drugs. But you can also learn how to abuse them. Many websites describe for would-be abusers what kinds of cough syrup they should buy, how much to take, and how to extract its intoxicating ingredient. Most disturbingly, it is as easy for a teenager to buy narcotic pain relievers like Vicodin or stimulants like Adderall or sedatives like Xanax over the Internet as it is to buy a book or CD. Enter "no prescription Vicodin" in your Web browser's search bar, and you'll find numerous websites ready to sell your son or daughter various prescription drugs—without the nuisance of an actual prescription or even asking your child's age—delivered to your home in an unmarked package. But the most immediate source of prescription and OTC drugs is your own medicine cabinet or the medicine cabinets in the homes of your child's friends. New and expired or forgotten prescriptions or last winter's OTC flu medicines could be inviting targets for the teenager looking to get high.

PARTY DRUGS

What to Do?

Some parents need to consider their own drug behavior. If you're casual about using prescription or OTC

drugs, even if you're not looking to get high, you can set a bad example. Medications should be used by the person for whom they're prescribed, to treat the conditions for which they're prescribed. Don't use your kid's Ritalin to give you the energy and focus to complete a difficult work assignment. Regard these drugs seriously, and it's a good bet your child will, too. Start by taking an inventory of the drugs in your medicine cabinet. It's up to you to educate yourself about the real dangers of prescription and OTC drug abuse and to discuss these risks with your teen. Kids need to hear from parents that **getting high on legal prescription and OTC drugs is not safer than getting high on illegal street drugs.** And reaching out to have that discussion is not just an idle suggestion. It works. Research shows that kids who learn a lot about drug risks from their parents are up to half as likely to use drugs as kids who haven't had that conversation with Mom and Dad. Unfortunately, research also shows that fewer parents today are talking to their teenagers about drugs than they were only a few years ago. It's time to turn that stat around. Additional Information can be found on the website of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America — <http://www.drugfree.org/>. Quite simply, if you're not educating your children about any health risk they may encounter, you are not providing the protection they need in today's changing world. What could be more basic to being a parent than protecting your child from harm?

Information taken from "The Partnership for a Drug-Free America." For additional information contact the Army Substance Abuse Program at 245-4576.

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