

Every year, the third week of March is designated National Poison Prevention Week (NPPW). Several years ago, the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition also designated this particular week National Inhalant and Poison Awareness Week (NIPAW). This year, NPPW and NIPAW is March 18-24, 2007.

The Northern New England Poison Center has dedicated this issue to rising trends:

- Prescription (Rx) drug abuse
- Over the counter (OTC) drug abuse
- Inhalant abuse



Please call NNEPC at 1-800-222-1222 or visit our website at www.nnepc.org for further information or free brochures.

Prescription (Rx) drugs are medications that are prescribed by a health care provider (HCP) to help patients with an illness or disease, injury, pain; or for other medical reasons. Prescription drugs should only be taken under an HCP's supervision. However, prescription drugs are being abused; the problem has become a public health issue.

Public Health Issues

According to the Partnership for Drug-Free America:

Nearly one in five teens (19 percent or 4.5 million) report abusing prescription medications to get high.

Abuse of Rx and over-the-counter (OTC) medications is **equal to or higher** than the abuse of illegal drugs. An alarming number of teens have a false sense of security about the safety of abusing Rx and OTC medications:

Two in five teens (40 percent or 9.4 million) agree that Rx medicines, even if they are not prescribed by a doctor, are "much safer" to use than illegal drugs;

Nearly one-third of teens (31 percent or 7.3 million) believe there is "nothing wrong" with using Rx medicines without a prescription "once in a while;"

Nearly three out of 10 teens (29 percent or 6.8 million) believe prescription pain relievers – even if not prescribed by a doctor – are not addictive; and

More than half of teens (55 percent or 13 million) do not agree strongly that using cough medicines to get high is risky.

What is prescription drug abuse?

- Taking someone else's Rx medication
- Taking too much of an Rx medication intentionally to get "high"
- Mixing Rx medications together intentionally to get "high"

Prescription medications are easy to obtain:

Abuse of prescription pain relievers is thought to be due to their widespread availability and easy access. According to the data:

- More than **three in five teens** say Rx pain relievers are easy to get from parents or other people's medicine cabinets.
- **Half of teens** say they are easy to get through other people's prescriptions.
- **More than half of teens** say pain relievers are "available everywhere."
- **43 percent of teens** believe pain relievers are cheap.
- **35 percent** believe they are safer to use than illegal drugs.

What types of drugs are commonly abused?

- Benzodiazepines — examples include lorazepam (Ativan®), diazepam (Valium®), alprazolam (Xanax®)
- Narcotic Pain Medications — examples include oxycodone (OxyContin®, Percocet®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®, Lortab®), codeine, morphine, methadone
- Stimulants — examples include amphetamines (Adderall®, Dexedrine®), methylphenidate (Ritalin®, Concerta®), caffeine (NoDoz®, Vivarin®)
- Skeletal muscle relaxants — examples include cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril®), methocarbamol (Robaxin®), carisoprodol (Soma®)

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Effects

- If abused, prescription drugs can alter brain activity, leading to dependence and addiction.
- Immediate effects include those on the central nervous system (CNS).

Some act as CNS depressants, which cause drowsiness that can progress to a decrease in the respiratory rate, heart rate and blood pressure.

Some act as CNS stimulants, which will cause the respiratory rate, heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature to rise. These can also cause an irregular heartbeat, agitation, restlessness and irritability.

Mixing some medication with other medications or alcohol can also be dangerous. For example, if alcohol (CNS depressant) is mixed with clonazepam (CNS depressant), the results can be deadly. Patients may stop breathing; or vomit, then choke.

Prevention tips

- Keep medications in their original containers (unless using a child-resistant daily pill reminder).
- Count your pills frequently.
- Keep medications out of sight and up high out of reach.
- If a pill does not look familiar, call the NNEPC at 1-800-222-1222 for identification and information.
- Take your medications only as prescribed.
- Discuss the medication with your medical care provider's office or pharmacist before taking it.
- Do not stop taking a prescribed medication without your HCP's advice.

- Do not mix medications without checking with your HCP or call the NNEPC at 1-800-222-1222 for advice.
- Learn about the dangers of prescription drug

abuse, and talk to your children!



Do you know what is in your medicine cabinet?

Most adults do not know what is in their medicine cabinet, but many teenagers do. According to studies by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, teens reported that their own medicine cabinet is a prime source for the products being intentionally abused. The 2004 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) estimated 5,581 emergency department visits were due to **Dextromethorphan (DXM)** abuse.



A “high” is caused by taking a large amount of DXM. The effects of taking large amounts of DXM vary by dose. These dose-dependent “plateaus” can range from mild stimulant effect with mild distortions of color and sound to a perceived of “out-of-body” experience. Teens who abuse DXM can also experience nausea, vomiting, panic attacks, seizures, psychosis, coma, respiratory depression and possibly death.

An additional risk of abusing cough medicines is that these products often contain other medicines, such as acetaminophen, commonly known as Tylenol®. Acetaminophen in large quantities can damage the liver. Medicines that contain antihistamines and decongestants can increase heart rate, blood pressure, temperature and increase the risk of seizures.

There are a number of slang names :

Dextromethorphan (DXM) – Robo, Syrup, Tussin, X, Poor Man’s Ecstasy, Dextro, Dex, Red Devils

Coricidan Cough & Cold Pills – Skittles, Triple C

DXM Capsules or Tablets – Black Beauties, Double Trouble

The use of DXM – Roboing, Robodosing, Roboting, Tussin

DXM is a common cough-suppressing ingredient found in over 100 products. When DXM is taken as recommended, it is safe and has few side effects.

Take these basic steps to prevent cough and cold medicine abuse:

- Talk to your child. Discuss the importance of reading and following the directions on medicine labels.
- Know your child’s health. Be aware if your child is using cough and cold medicines outside of cold and flu season.
- Clean out your medicine cabinet. Discard expired or unused medicines. Ask questions if you notice any products are used frequently or disappear.
- Call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222 to order the free brochure “Parent’s Guide – Preventing Teen Cough Medicine Abuse”.

INHALANT ABUSE

It's right under your nose

Inhalant abuse facts

- ◆ Inhalants are an often overlooked form of substance abuse.
- ◆ Inhalant abuse is the deliberate inhalation of intoxicating vapors or gases from common household products for the purpose of altering one's mood.
- ◆ The terms used for inhalant abuse are huffing, sniffing or bagging.
- ◆ According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), there are four categories of inhalants: volatile substances, aerosols, gases and nitrites.
- ◆ More than 1,000 everyday products, including cleaning, office and art supplies, solvents, gases and shop chemicals have the potential to be abused.
- ◆ Inhalants are actually poisons, pollutants and fire hazards.
- ◆ ***Sudden sniffing death*** can result from a single session of inhalant abuse by an otherwise healthy person.
- ◆ Inhalant abuse can be addictive.
- ◆ Inhalant abuse can cause permanent damage to the nerves, lungs, liver and brain.
- ◆ Based on the 2006 Monitoring the Future Survey, one in six 8th graders has admitted abusing inhalants.
- ◆ Inhalant abuse can start as early as 3rd grade.
- ◆ Inhalant abuse peaks in between 7th and 9th grade.

Why do health care providers, teachers and other advocates for children need to be informed about inhalant abuse?

- ◆ Research indicates that teenagers are at risk for inhalant abuse.
- ◆ A key prevention effort is to educate parents about the risk of abuse.
- ◆ The falling perception of the risk of inhalants is worrisome.
- ◆ Research shows lower perceptions of risk usually correlates with an increase in drug use.
- ◆ Since 2001 teens have become less likely to agree there is a great risk in using inhalants once or twice.
- ◆ According to the Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) in 2005, 64% of teens strongly agree that inhalants can kill. This is an decrease from 2001, when 83% of teens strongly agreed that inhalants can kill.

Parents need to know so that they can educate their children!

- ◆ Despite the fact that one in six children admitted abusing inhalants, only four in one hundred parents believe their child has ever abused inhalants.
- ◆ Although research shows that discussions between parents and children can reduce substance abuse, parents are not talking with their children about the risks of inhalant abuse as often as they discuss cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana.

Prevention Tips

- ◆ Identify products that can be abused in the home, school and office.
- ◆ Use non-toxic substances, such as non-aerosols and water-based products.
- ◆ Supervise the use of toxic products, and educate children about product safety.
- ◆ Talk to your children about the dangers of inhalants.
- ◆ Know your resources! For further information, go to http://www.mmc.org/mmc_body.cfm?id=3758
- ◆ Do not tolerate any experimentation.

Available Resources

Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 or www.nnepc.org

Free and confidential information 24 hours a day

Educational materials

National Inhalant Prevention Coalition www.inhalants.org

New England Inhalant Abuse Prevention Coalition

www.inhalantprevention.org

Online adult inhalant training at www.inhalantabusetraining.org

State Health Departments for information and local prevention or treatment programs :

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention at www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services www.dhhs.state.nh.us

Vermont Department of Health at www.healthvermont.gov

