



## COMBATTING PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE April 2008

The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has launched its first major federal effort to educate parents about prescription drug abuse. The public awareness campaign began with ONDCP paying for advertising targeting parents during the Super Bowl this year.

This campaign includes broadcast, print and online advertising, community outreach, and new print and online resources to help parents and communities combat the troubling trend of youth prescription drug abuse.

More youth abuse prescription drugs than any other illicit drug, except marijuana; more than cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined. Every day, 2,500 kids age 12-17 abuse a prescription painkiller for the first time and more people are getting addicted to prescription drugs. Drug treatment admissions for prescription painkillers increased more than 300% from 1995 to 2005.

Youth are abusing prescription drugs because many believe the myth that these drugs provide a "safe" high. It is especially troubling that the majority of youth who abuse prescription drugs say they are easy to get and are often free. Many parents are not aware of prescription drug abuse and are not discussing the dangers with their children. Only 1/3 of parents have discussed the risks of prescription drugs with their youth, even though research shows that parental disapproval is a powerful way to keep teens away from using drugs.

According to the director of National Drug Control Policy, "Most teens who abuse prescription drugs say they get them from home, or from friends and relatives. We need parents to recognize that not all drug threats to their teens come from the street corner. Prescription drugs are in practically every home and parents can have an immediate impact on stopping this drug abuse."

### What are the dangers?

Youth are abusing mainly 3 types of prescription drugs: painkillers (for use after surgeries or injuries), depressants (sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs), and stimulants (those drugs prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Serious health risks come with this abuse. A single large dose of prescription painkiller or depressants can cause breathing difficulty that can lead to death. Stimulant abuse can lead to hostility or paranoia, or the potential for heart system failure or fatal seizures. Prescription drug abuse is addictive.

### Why are kids using?

Youth report abusing prescription drugs for the same reason as they take illegal drugs: to get high; to party; to experiment; to relieve boredom; to help them cope (manage stress, depression, or anxiety or help them relax); to deal with pressures (increase alertness or concentration to do better in school, control their weight); to self-medicate (relieve pain or sleep better). They abuse RX drugs because they believe it is not illegal, there is less shame attached to using them, there are fewer side effects than street drugs and because some parents "don't care as much if you get caught."

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### Where are kids getting the drugs?

Friends and the family medicine cabinet are the major sources of these drugs. Some youth abuse their own prescriptions. Where to look?

- At home in the family bathroom where leftover drugs may be kept after an injury or surgery for a family member.
- From friends: their parents may not be aware of how to safeguard medicines.
- From relatives: grandparents may be another source, if they keep prescription drugs on hand for their illnesses.

### What can parents do?

- Safeguard all drugs at home. Monitor quantities and control access. Know what you have and how much; if you have to refill medication more often than expected, you could have a problem.
- Set clear rules for youth about all drug use, including not sharing medicine and always following the medical provider's advice and dosages. Never use prescription or over-the-counter medications with street drugs or alcohol.
- Be a good role model by following these same rules with your own medications. Don't give your prescriptions to your kids or abuse them yourself.
- Properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medicines. Here are some suggestions for proper disposal of drugs: take unused, unneeded, or expired drugs out of their original containers and throw them in the trash; mix drugs with an undesirable substance such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter and put them in containers to throw in the trash; flush drugs down the toilet **ONLY** if the label specifically tells you to; use community pharmaceutical take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal.
- Ask friends and family to safeguard their prescription drugs as well. Make sure friends and relatives know the dangers.
- Talk to your youth about the dangers of abusing drugs.

Visit the source of this information: [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com) for additional information and explanations regarding the abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.