



DANGERS OF DEXTROMETHORPHAN

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Dextromethorphan (DXM) is a cough suppressant available in a variety of over-the-counter cough and cold medications. DXM is abused because, when taken in doses that dramatically exceed those recommended by physicians, it produces hallucinations and a sense of dissociation.

As an over-the-counter medication, DXM is available in various forms, including liquids, lozenges, tablets, capsules and gel caps. Additionally, DXM powder, prepared by extracting the drug from cough syrup, is increasingly being sold via the Internet.

Cough syrup was the most commonly abused form of the drug, in the past. Abusers consumed large doses, usually at least half an 8-oz. bottle, by drinking the liquid very quickly. They must drink it fast enough to allow the body to absorb the DXM before vomiting occurs, which is induced by the large quantity of the drug. Now, abusers also take large quantities of the pill forms.

Teenagers and young adults are the principal abusers of DXM. Since it is sold over the counter, often on open shelves, it is readily available and even susceptible to shoplifting. Its accessibility and relatively low price make it particularly attractive to young people, especially compared to illicit drugs.

DXM is not illegal. It is available without a prescription because, when used properly, it has proven to be a safe and effective means of cough suppression. Reports of abuse of the drug have resulted in monitoring by the Drug Enforcement Administration, and it could be added to the Controlled Substances Act if warranted.

Street names and slang terms for DXM include:

- Dex
- DM
- Drex
- Robo
- Rojo
- Skittles
- Triple C
- Velvet

What are the effects and risks? When users adhere to recommended doses, DXM is generally safe. But those who abuse it consume much higher doses, which produce hallucinations and dissociative effects similar to those experienced with PCP (phencyclidine) or ketamine. While under the influence of the drug, which can last for as long as 6 hours, DXM abusers risk injuring themselves and others because of the drug's effects on visual perception and cognitive processes.

Individuals who ingest high doses of DXM risk hyperthermia (exceptionally high fever), particularly if they use the drug in a hot environment or while physically exerting themselves, such as at dances or in athletics. Other risks of DXM abuse include: nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, headache, numbness of fingers and toes, loss of consciousness, seizures, brain damage, and death.

