

# Did You Know?

## More Children Being Accidentally Poisoned by Prescription Drugs

### Drug Demand Reduction Program

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A growing number of children and teenagers are being accidentally poisoned by opioids and medications for adult chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes, according to a new study.

More than 70,000 children under 18 go to the emergency room because of accidental medication exposures and poisonings each year, according to researchers from Boston Children's Hospital. They report in *Pediatrics* the rate of such visits rose 30 percent between 2001 and 2008. Hospitalization rates for accidental poisonings in children rose 36 percent. Serious injuries and hospitalizations occurred most frequently with opioids and diabetes medications. "Increasing adult drug prescriptions are strongly associated with rising pediatric exposures and poisonings, particularly for opioids and among children 0 to 5 years old," the researchers wrote. "These associations have sizable impacts, including high rates of serious injury and health care use."

The study excluded antidepressants, because they are increasingly prescribed for young people. The researchers wanted to look at drugs that generally are prescribed for adults. The researchers found children under age 5 were most at risk for poisoning, followed by teens ages 13 to 19.

Young children generally are accidentally poisoned when they swallow drugs they find while exploring, while teens tend to seek out drugs such as opioids and intentionally take them.

According to research conducted by The Partnership at Drugfree.org (as well as other reputable national studies) as many as one in five teens say they have taken a prescription drug without having a prescription for it themselves. This behavior cuts across geographic, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries.

Why are some teens doing this? They're abusing some stimulants such as Ritalin and Adderall to give them additional energy and ability to focus when they're studying or taking tests. They're abusing pain relievers like OxyContin and tranquilizers such as Xanax to cope with academic, social or emotional stress. They're abusing prescription amphetamines to lose weight, or prescription steroids to bulk up.

What are the risks? There are both acute (immediate) and longer term risks. In the short term, overdosing (especially on prescription pain relievers) can be fatal, as can mixing prescription drugs with over-the-counter medication and/or alcohol. In the longer term, prescription opioids (pain relievers) and other prescription medicines are potentially addictive. Coming to rely at a young age on prescription medicine (or any drug) to —manage your life risks establishing a learned, lifelong pattern of dependency and limitation and prevents learning coping skills.

Where are teens getting these prescription drugs?

The vast majority of teens abusing prescription drugs are getting them from the medicine cabinets of friends, family and acquaintances. Some teens traffic among themselves — handing out or selling — extra pills of their own, or pills they've acquired or stolen from classmates. A very small minority of teens say they get their prescription drugs illicitly from doctors, pharmacists or over the internet.

What should parents do? Lock your medicines and communicate the risks of prescription drug abuse to your kids. Children who know the risks of drug abuse are 50% less likely not to use drugs.



Source of Information: DrugFree.org