



Help Prevent Adolescent Medicine Abuse

A FACT SHEET FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

What is prescription medicine abuse?

Prescription (Rx) medicine abuse is the use of an Rx medicine to create an altered state, to get high or for any reason other than those intended by the prescribing doctor.

How many teens are doing this?

According to research conducted by The Partnership at Drugfree.org, one in four teens say they have taken a prescription medicine – that was not prescribed to them – at least once in their lifetime. This behavior cuts across geographic, racial, ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries.

Why are some teens doing this?

Teens are engaging in this dangerous behavior for a variety of reasons. In some cases, they do it to party and get high, but also to manage stress or regulate their lives. Some are abusing prescription stimulants used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to provide additional energy and the ability to focus when they're studying or taking tests. Many teens are abusing pain relievers and tranquilizers to cope with academic, social or emotional stress.

What are the risks?

There are both immediate and long-term risks to medicine abuse. In the short term, overdosing can be fatal, as can mixing Rx medicine with over-the-counter medicine and/or alcohol. In the longer term, prescription opioids (pain relievers) and other prescription medicines have been

proven to be potentially addictive. Relying on Rx medicines at a young age to help “manage” life can establish a lifelong pattern of dependency and prevent teens from learning important coping skills.

Where are teens getting prescription medicine?

Two-thirds (66 percent) of teens who report abuse of prescription medicine are getting them from friends, family and acquaintances. Some teens share Rx medicines among themselves – handing out or selling their own pills or those they've acquired or stolen from classmates. A very small minority of teens also say they get their prescription medicine illicitly over the internet.

How can health care providers help fight teenage medicine abuse?

Health care providers are uniquely positioned to dramatically reduce medicine abuse and help prevent nonmedical use of prescriptions. Raising this issue with your adolescent patients and their parents, as well as other patients to whom you prescribe medicine, can be a powerful intervention. Taking the opportunity to talk to teenagers and their parents about the abuse of any prescriptions can shape their behavior and help identify the need for further assessment or treatment.

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How can I help prevent diversion of the medications I prescribe?

Ensure your prescriptions are aligned with your medical association's most recent guidance for dosage, strength, and prescription details (including length of time and refill permissions). Provide patients and their parents with directions on how to monitor, safeguard and properly dispose of unused medicine.

How can I screen my adolescent patients for potential substance abuse?

Drug and alcohol screens can help you assess your patients' risk for substance abuse. Consider integrating a standardized screener into your intake process and at the beginning of each visit, ensuring that it gets done. Find a list of materials on Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT), including a resource from SAMHSA that discusses reimbursement.

How can I find out if my patients have received prescriptions elsewhere?

Prescription Monitoring Programs (PMPs) can give providers information on patient use of controlled substances by other prescribers and prevent "doctor shopping." [The PMP Alliance](#) can help you find information about your state's prescription monitoring program.

Should I consider using patient-prescriber agreements?

Patient-Prescriber Agreements are designed to increase patient awareness of their responsibilities and the potential risks related to medicine. These agreements have the potential to powerfully impact patient behavior. They include explicit statements to follow provider directives, safeguard medicine, properly dispose of unused or expired medicine and communicate with the prescriber about side effects or intentions to alter the dose. Consider introducing a Patient-Prescriber Agreement every time you prescribe an opioid or stimulant, especially if your patient is an adolescent, parent or grandparent, or might be at increased risk for abuse.

Here are two educational pieces to give to your patients:

- [Fact Sheet: Preventing Teen Prescription Medicine Abuse](#)
- [Commonly Abused Prescription Drugs](#)

If you know a parent or caregiver struggling with a child's drug or alcohol problem, please encourage them to call our [Toll-Free Parent Helpline](#) to speak to a parent specialist:

1-855-DRUGFREE

1-855-378-4373

It's free, nationwide support in English and Spanish.

