Abuse of Prescription Pain Medicine in Massachusetts:

Attitudes and Behavior Among Parents of Teens

October, 2011
Background and Methodology

Overview
• The Partnership at Drugfree.org conducted an online study to understand parents’ behaviors and perceptions about prescription pain medication in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
• Interviews were conducted from September 19, 2011 – September 22, 2011.

Methodology
• Ten minute online quantitative survey
• Respondents recruited via national panel sample

Sample
• 305 Total Respondents
• All respondents are primary caregivers of children 12-25 years living at home
Key Findings

• Over half of Parents (56%) say their children have access to their prescription pain medication.

• Currently, the kitchen (36%) is the top storage location for prescription pain medications, followed by the bathroom (31%) and bedroom (25%).

• A third (30%) of those who still have pain relievers at home keep them in case someone in their family needs them in the future.

• Nearly half of Parents (45%) say they have taken pain relievers without a prescription at some point. Nearly all have used them for physical pain.
  • 14% say they have ever given their children pain medications without a prescription.

• Only 4% of Parents believe their children have used prescription pain relievers without their knowledge and 13% say they believe their children’s friends use pain killers to get high.

• According to Parents, teens get pain killers from friends (86%) or by taking them from their own homes (75%).
Key Findings

• A third (34%) of respondents say that their own parents use prescription pain relievers, but only 19% have spoken to grandparents about safeguarding their medications.

• Almost everyone (94%) acknowledges that, if abused, prescription pain relievers can be as addictive as heroin. However, only 30% are certain that the active ingredient in pain killers is similar to heroin.

• All Parents (97%) say they have discussed the dangers of alcohol and street drugs with their children but only three-quarters (76%) have specifically discussed prescription pain killers.

• 87% of Caregivers say they would know what to do if their child was abusing pain killers. Three-quarters (74%) would first call their pediatrician and two out of five (43%) would call a treatment center.

• Only two-thirds (67%) of Parents express having concerns over their child using any type of substance. Alcohol (33%) is the top substance that worries them, followed by marijuana (11%).
DETAILED FINDINGS
Over half of Parents say that their children have easy access to the prescription medicine kept in the house.

Q7a. Do your children have easy access to the prescription medication you keep at home?
Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
Primary Storage Locations for Medication

The kitchen is the most popular location to store medications, followed by the bathroom and bedroom.
Reasons Why Still Have Medication at Home

Nearly a third of Caregivers who still have prescriptions at home are holding onto them in case someone else in their household needs pain medication.

Among 56% of respondents who still have medications at home

- Still taking it as prescribed: 33%
- In case someone in my family gets hurt and needs pain medication: 30%
- Just never got around to getting rid of it: 12%
- Forgot about it: 7%
- It was expensive and I didn't want to just throw it out: 6%
- In case I need to relax or deal with stress: 2%

Q8. Do you still have any prescription pain medication in your home?  
Q9. What is the main reason you still have it?  
Base: Total Respondents (n=305), Still have RX (n=171)
Ways of Disposing of Prescription Medication

A quarter of caregivers who no longer have medications opted to flush any leftovers down the toilet. Only 5% participated in a drug take-back program.

Among 44% of Respondents who no longer have medications at home

- Used the entire supply: 60%
- Flushed them down the toilet: 25%
- Threw them in home garbage: 12%
- Took them to a pharmacy: 6%
- Participated in a community drug take-back program: 5%

Q8. Do you still have any prescription pain medication in your home?
Q10. How did you dispose of your prescription medications?
Base: Total Respondents (n=305), Do not have RX (n=134)
Nearly half of Parents have taken a pain reliever without a prescription and almost all of them did it to treat physical pain.

- Frequently: 4%
- Every once in a while: 22%
- Once or twice: 19%

**Total Reasons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treat physical pain</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help deal with stress / anxiety</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To treat insomnia</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help deal with depression</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To feel good / party / get high</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</table>

Q11. How often do you take prescription pain relievers without a prescription?
Q12. What was the reason you used a prescription pain reliever without a prescription?
Base: Total Respondents (n=305), Taken RX w/o prescription (n=139)
Frequency of Giving Children Pain Relievers without a Prescription

Only 14% of Caregivers admit giving their children pain relievers that were not specifically prescribed to them. Nearly all say it was to treat physical pain.

Q13. How often do you give your child a prescription pain reliever without a prescription?
Q14. What was the reason why you recently gave your child a prescription pain reliever without a prescription?
Base: Total Respondents (n=305), Gave RX to Child (n=44)

- Every once in a while: 7%
- Once or twice: 7%

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Reason</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treat physical pain</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
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</table>
Has Your Child Used Pain Relievers You Have Not Provided to Them without a Prescription?

Only 4% of Parents believe their child may have taken pain relievers and 13% believe their children’s friends use pain relievers to get high.

**My Child Has Used Pain Relievers**
- Yes: 4%
- No: 96%

**My Child’s Friends Have Used Pain Relievers to Get High**
- Yes: 13%
- No: 87%

Q15. To your knowledge has your child/children ever used a prescription pain reliever – that you have not given him/her – without a prescription? Q21. Are you aware of any of your child’s/children’s friends using prescription pain killers to get high? Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
Who Provides Pain Killers to Teens?

Parents believe most teenagers get pain killers from friends or their own homes. Over half also say teens are buying them from friends or drug dealers.

Q16. How do you think most teens get prescription pain killers not prescribed to them by a doctor?

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)

- Friends give it to them: 86%
- Take it from their own home: 73%
- Buy at school from a friend / dealer: 48%
- Buy outside of school from a friend / dealer: 41%
- Relative / friend's house: 39%
- Parents give it to them: 15%
- Internet / online: 8%
- Fake prescriptions: 3%
- Doctor illegally gives it to them: 2%

Net: 55%
A third of parents know that their own parents use prescription pain relievers. However, they are less likely to speak to them about safeguarding medication – only 1 in 10 have discussed it.

Q17. Does your child’s grandparents keep prescription pain relievers where your child could access them when he/she visits or when they visit you? Q24. Have you spoken with your children’s grandparents specifically about hiding potentially addictive medications when your children come to visit or when they visit you? Base: Total Respondents (n=305), Grandparents keep RX (n=216)
Beliefs About Pain Medication

Nearly all parents agree that pain relievers can be as addictive as heroin. However, less than a third fully understand that the active ingredient in pain relievers is similar to heroin.

Q18. Please let us know how much you agree with the following statements.
Base: Total Respondents (n=305)

- If abused, some prescription pain relievers can be as addictive as heroin: 15% Somewhat agree, 79% Strongly agree (94% overall agreement)
- The active ingredient in many prescription pain relievers is similar to heroin: 40% Somewhat agree, 30% Strongly agree (70% overall agreement)
- As long as it is for pain relief I would feel okay giving my teen a prescription pain medication without a prescription: 15% Somewhat agree, 3% Strongly agree (18% overall agreement)
- I wouldn't be as worried about my teen if he/she abused prescription pain relievers as I would be if he/she used street drugs like cocaine or heroine: 8% Somewhat agree, 6% Strongly agree (14% overall agreement)
Are Parents Talking to Their Children About Drugs?

All parents say they have spoken to their children about the dangers of alcohol and/or street drugs. However, only three-quarters have specifically discussed prescription pain killers with their kids.

Q19. Have you spoken with your child about the dangers of using alcohol or street drugs like heroin or cocaine?
Q20. Have you spoken with your child specifically about the dangers of using prescription pain killers without a doctor’s prescription?

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
Approximately 9 out of 10 parents say they would know what to do if their child was abusing pain relievers. Three-quarters would talk to their pediatrician first and nearly half would call a treatment center.

Q22. If you knew your child was abusing prescription pain killers would you know what to do?
Q23. If you knew your child was abusing prescription pain killers, what would you be most likely to do?

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
A third of parents do not believe their children will try any drugs. Alcohol is the substance parents are most worried about their child using.

Q26. Which substance below are you most concerned that your child MIGHT use?

- Concerned of any use (NET): 67%
- Alcohol: 33%
- Marijuana: 11%
- Cocaine or crack: 6%
- Heroin: 3%
- Methamphetamine: 3%
- Cigarettes: 3%
- Ecstasy: 3%
- Prescription pain medicine to get high: 2%
- OTC medicine to get high: 2%
- Inhalants: 1%

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
SAMPLE PROFILE
Types of Prescription Drugs Used in Past 2 Years

Oxycodone and Hydrocodone are the top prescribed medications used by parents with children living at home.

Q5. In the last 2 years, which of the following prescription pain relievers have you been prescribed or had in your home even if it is not prescribed for you?
Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
Children Age and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Ages 12-25</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First child</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second child</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third child</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth child</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender, Age, Relationship to Children

Average Age: 49

Male 23%
Female 77%

Relationship to Child

98% Parent / Step-parent
2% Other family

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
Marital and Employment Status

Marital Status
- Single: 4%
- Married / Living with partner: 78%
- Separated / Divorced / Widowed: 18%

Employment Status
- Full-time: 55%
- Part-time: 22%
- Full-time homemaker: 11%
- Unemployed: 7%
- Retired: 4%
- Student: 1%

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
Highest Level of Education

- High school graduate: 10%
- Technical / trade school: 5%
- Some college: 22%
- Associate's Degree: 14%
- Bachelor's degree: 24%
- Some post-graduate work: 6%
- Post-graduate degree: 19%

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)
Race / Ethnicity and Household Income

**Race / Ethnicity**

- Caucasian: 93%
- Asian / Pacific Islander: 4%
- Hispanic: 3%
- Black / African American: 1%
- Multi-ethnic: 1%
- Other: 1%

**Household Income**

- Less than $50,000: 15%
- $50,000 to $74,999: 22%
- $75,000 to $99,999: 22%
- $100,000 or more: 41%

Base: Total Respondents (n=305)