

PATS KEY FINDINGS: Released April 23, 2013
2012 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation

New, nationally projectable survey results released today by [The Partnership at Drugfree.org](http://ThePartnershipatDrugfree.org) and [MetLife Foundation](http://MetLifeFoundation.org) confirmed that one in four teens has misused or abused a prescription (Rx) drug at least once in their lifetime – a 33 percent increase over the past five years. The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) also found troubling data on teen misuse or abuse of prescription stimulants. One in eight teens (13 percent) now reports that they have taken the stimulants Ritalin or Adderall when it was not prescribed for them, at least once in their lifetime.

Contributing to this sustained trend in teen medicine abuse are the lax attitudes and beliefs of parents and caregivers. In fact, nearly one-third of parents say they believe [Rx stimulants](#) like Ritalin or Adderall, normally prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), can improve a teen's academic performance even if the teen does not have ADHD. Parents are not effectively communicating the dangers of Rx medicine misuse and abuse to their kids, nor are they safeguarding their medications at home and disposing of unused medications properly.

Concerning Trends in Teen Prescription Drug Abuse According to the New PATS Data (2008-2012)

- One in four teens (24 percent) reports having misused or abused a prescription drug at least once in their lifetime (up from 18 percent in 2008 to 24 percent in 2012), which translates to about 5 million teens. That is a 33 percent increase over a five-year period.
- Of those kids who said they abused Rx medications, one in five (20 percent) has done so before age 14.
- More than a quarter of teens (27 percent) mistakenly believe that misusing and abusing prescription drugs is safer than using street drugs.
- One-third of teens (33 percent) say they believe "it's okay to use prescription drugs that were not prescribed to them to deal with an injury, illness or physical pain."
- Almost one in four teens (23 percent) say their parents don't care as much if they are caught using Rx drugs without a doctor's prescription, compared to getting caught with illegal drugs.

Significant Increase in Teen Abuse of Stimulants Ritalin and Adderall, Rx Painkiller Abuse Flattening

- One in eight teens (about 2.7 million) now reports having misused or abused the Rx stimulants Ritalin or Adderall at least once in their lifetime.
- 9 percent of teens (about 1.9 million) report having misused or abused the Rx stimulants Ritalin or Adderall in the past year (up from 6 percent in 2008) and 6 percent of teens (1.3 million) report abuse of Ritalin or Adderall in the past month (up from 4 percent in 2008).
- One in four teens (26 percent) believes that prescription drugs can be used as a study aid.

Parents' Missed Opportunity: Lax Attitudes and Permissiveness About Rx Drugs Linked to Teen Abuse

- Almost one-third of parents (29 percent) say they believe ADHD medication can improve a child's academic or testing performance, even if the teen does not have ADHD.

- One in six parents (16 percent) believes that using prescription drugs to get high is safer than using street drugs.
- Teens reported that during the last conversation they had with their parents regarding substance abuse, only 16 percent said they discussed the misuse or abuse of prescription pain relievers with their parents, and just 14 percent indicate the same for discussions about any type of prescription drug. In comparison, a majority of teens (81 percent) say they have discussed the risks of marijuana use with their parents, 80 percent have discussed alcohol and nearly one-third of teens (30 percent) have discussed crack/cocaine.
- More than half of teens (56 percent) indicate that it's easy to get prescription drugs from their parent's medicine cabinet. In fact, about half of parents (49 percent) say anyone can access their medicine cabinet.
- More than four in 10 teens (42 percent) who have misused or abused a prescription drug obtained it from their parent's medicine cabinet. Almost half (49 percent) of teens who misuse or abuse Rx medicines obtained them from a friend.

Teens are more likely to use prescription drugs if they believe that their parents are more lenient toward prescription drug misuse or abuse compared to illegal drug abuse, and if their parents use drugs themselves.

- One in five parents (20 percent) report that they have given their teen a prescription drug that was not prescribed for them.
- The PATS survey also found that 17 percent of parents do not throw away expired medications, and 14 percent of parents say that they themselves have misused or abuse prescription drugs within the past year.

Mixed Results on Teen Abuse of Other Substances

- Cigarette smoking rates have remained stable, with 22 percent of teens reporting they've used cigarettes in the past month.
- [Inhalant](#) abuse also remained stable, with 7 percent of teens indicating they've abused inhalants over the past year.
- In 2012, almost half of teens (45 percent) have used marijuana in their lifetime, four in 10 (39 percent) have used in the past year and one in four (24 percent) have used within the past month. Currently, 57 percent of all teens have used alcohol within the past year (a 10 percent increase from 2008).
- Past-year abuse of [over-the-counter \(OTC\) cough medicine](#) abuse has remained relatively stable at 7 percent (since 2008).
- [Methamphetamine](#) use has remained stable, with 4 percent of teens reporting having abused methamphetamine in the past year (since 2008).
- Past-year cocaine use remains at 7 percent (unchanged since 2008).
- Lifetime [steroid](#) use is stable at 5 percent (unchanged since 2008).
- Past-year use of [Ecstasy](#) is at 8 percent, and has been steadily declining since a surge in prevalence during 2009.
- Past-year use of synthetic drugs is mixed as well, with 12 percent of teens using synthetic marijuana, 4 percent using salvia and 3 percent using [bath salts](#).