

Prescription Drug Abuse

What is Prescription Drug Abuse?

Described as an epidemic by the CDC, prescription drug abuse is the use of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes. Over 6 million Americans abuse prescription drugs and more Americans now abuse prescription drugs than cocaine, hallucinogens, and heroin combined (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2011).

Prescription Drug Abuse among Youth:

Nationally, about 1 in 4 teens have misused or abused a prescription drug at least once in their lifetime, representing a 33% increase since 2008 (Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, 2013).

In Texas, about 1 in 5 high school students reported ever taking prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2013). Among middle and high school students, 10.8% reported non-medical lifetime use of codeine cough syrup, 7.5% of hydrocodone, 3.6% of oxycodone, 3.9% of Xanax, and 2.0% of Valium (DSHS, 2012).

Among Texas college students, 17% reported using prescription drugs to get high at least once in their lifetime. Painkillers were the most commonly abused type of prescription drug, reported by 11% of students, followed by stimulants (9%) and sedatives (7%) (DSHS, Texas School Survey of Substance Use among College Students, 2013).

Easy Access to Prescription Drugs:

70% of people who abuse prescription drugs got them from a friend or relative (NSDUH, 2009-2010). Prescriptions for these commonly abused medications have increased drastically in recent years. Since 1999, the amount of opioid painkiller prescribed in the US increased by 300%, mirroring the increase in overdose deaths (CDC, Vital Signs, Nov. 4, 2011).

Overdoses:

Drug overdose death rates in the US have more than tripled since 1990 and are increasingly due to prescription drugs (CDC, Vital Signs, Nov. 4, 2011). The health and societal impact goes beyond overdoses: for every 1 death from prescription drug overdose, there are 10 treatment admissions for abuse, 32 emergency department visits for abuse or misuse, 130 people who abuse or are dependent, and 825 nonmedical users (CDC, Policy Impact, Nov. 2012).

COMMONLY ABUSED MEDICATION TYPES AND EXAMPLES

Opioid pain relievers:

oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet),
hydrocodone (Vicodin)
methadone
codeine

Benzodiazepines:

aprazalom (Xanax)
diazepam (Valium)
clonazepam (Ativan)

Stimulants:

amphetamine/dextroamphetamine (Adderall)
methylphenidate (Ritalin, Concerta)

Source: CDC Policy Impact, Nov 2012.

Prescription Drug Take Back Programs



Safe Medication Disposal

Drug take back events and drug drop boxes are ways to safely dispose of unused medications. These programs help prevent drug abuse and poisonings and protect the environment by removing unneeded medications from homes and disposing of them properly.

Take Back Events

Take Back Events are events where community members can bring medications for safe disposal. These events are usually held in an easily-accessible location on a weekend and last about 4 hours. Law enforcement officers must be present in order to



ensure security at the location and to collect controlled medications. Pharmacies and long-term care facilities cannot host a take back event but can partner with law enforcement agencies that conduct take back events.

In order to provide a safe, convenient, and

responsible way to dispose of prescription drugs, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) partners with local law enforcement and community organizations to host National Take Back Days. Though the agency halted the program in 2014, DEA Administrator Chuck Rosenberg reinstated it in July of 2015. Still, local law enforcement agencies and community coalitions are encouraged to consider ways in which they can continue to host take back events and dispose of medications in case the agency discontinues the program in the future.

Permanent Medication Drop Boxes

Permanent medication drop boxes are locked, mailbox-like receptacles where individuals can drop off medications for safe disposal. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) requires that drop boxes be located at a law enforcement agency or, as of October 2014, a pharmacy or long-term care facility.

For drop boxes located at a law enforcement agency, law enforcement officers are responsible for collecting and disposing of medications. Law enforcement agencies can usually dispose of collected medications in the same method they would dispose of other drugs or collected substances. Pharmacies and long-term care facilities must follow more specific regulations regarding collection and disposal. For more details on the regulations, visit the DEA's website at www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal.

Drop boxes generally cost between \$600-\$1000. Funding support for drug drop boxes is limited. However, coalitions may use grant funding or law enforcement agencies can apply for funding through organizations such as CVS Pharmacy and the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators.

Role of Coalitions

Coalitions play an important role in take back events and serve as valuable partners to law enforcement agencies. Opportunities for coalitions include: promoting, volunteering, and/or funding take back events; promoting existing drug drop boxes; researching regulations and drug disposal options; obtaining media coverage; and, if able, purchasing a drug drop box for law enforcement agencies.

Note re. Prescription Drug Take Back Programs:

On Sept. 8, 2014, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) released a rule change regarding disposal of controlled substances. As a result of this change, drug drop boxes are now allowed in pharmacies and long-term care facilities in addition to law enforcement agencies.