



White House Office of National Drug Control Policy National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign

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Contact: Jennifer de Vallance, ONDCP, (202) 395-6618
Rosanna Maietta, Fleishman-Hillard, (917) 533-1097

TEENS TURN AWAY FROM STREET DRUGS, MOVE TO PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, NEW REPORT REVEALS

White House Report Shows Alarming Trends in Teens' Use of Prescription Drugs; New Users of Prescription Drugs Have Caught Up with New Users of Marijuana

(New York, NY) - Director of National Drug Control Policy John P. Walters today released a new White House analysis that shows alarming trends in teen abuse of prescription drugs and cough and cold medicines to get high. The report shows that teens are turning away from street drugs, like marijuana and cocaine, and are now abusing prescription drugs to get high.

New users of prescription drugs have now caught up with new users of marijuana. Prescription drugs are now the second most commonly used illegal drug by teens to get high, behind marijuana. The report, "Teens and Prescription Drugs: An Analysis of Recent Trends on the Emerging Drug Threat," released today by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), also shows that the majority of teens, who use these products, are getting them easily and for free.

"Parents need to know that teens are turning away from street drugs and increasingly abusing prescription drugs to get high. They should also be aware that suppliers of these drugs might not be sinister characters on the street corner, but are more likely close friends or relatives," said Director Walters. "Too many young people see popping pills as a painless high."

Although illicit drug use among teens has dropped by 23 percent over the last five years, ONDCP and other experts warned parents at a press conference this morning in New York City that teens are intentionally abusing prescription drugs to get high, wrongly believing that they are safer than street drugs. In addition, teens are getting prescription drugs for free and have easy access to them – taking them from friends or relatives without their knowledge.

The report also shows the following trends:

- New abusers of prescription drugs have caught up with new users of marijuana;
- Pain relievers, such as OxyContin and Vicodin, are the most commonly abused prescription drugs by teens;
- One third of all new abusers of prescription drugs in 2005 were 12-17-year olds;
- Prescription drugs are the drug of choice among 12- and 13-year olds;
- Girls are more likely than boys to intentionally abuse prescription drugs to get high;
- The majority of teens (57%), who use these products, say they get prescription drugs for free from a relative or friend (47%), or take them from a relative or friend (10%), without asking. An additional 10 percent buy pain relievers from a friend or relative; and
- Adolescents are more likely than young adults to become dependent on prescription medication.

Although millions of Americans benefit from the proper use of prescription drugs, they can be dangerous and even lethal when taken without medical supervision or mixed with other drugs or alcohol.

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Teens who abuse prescription drugs to get high can suffer serious consequences including addiction, strokes, addiction, seizures, comas, and even death.

“The explosion in the prescription of addictive opioids, depressants and stimulants has, for many children, made their parents' medicine cabinet a greater temptation and threat than a street drug dealer,” said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., Chairman and President, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. “The world of children and teens is awash in prescription drugs and some parents can become inadvertent drug pushers by leaving their prescription opioids, stimulants and depressants in places where their kids can get them.”

Unfortunately, most parents are not talking to their teens about the dangers of abusing prescription drugs, despite the fact that teens think they're safer than street drugs. More than a third of teens believe that prescription drugs are much safer to use than illegal drugs because they are prescribed by a doctor, according to teens who responded to surveys on prescription drugs. And about seven million teens believe there's “nothing wrong” with using prescription drugs without a prescription “once in a while.” But only one third of parents say they have discussed the risks associated with the abuse of prescription drugs and cough and cold medicines with their teen.

“Between adolescence and young adulthood, teens are trying to discover who they are and find where they fit in, which can make them vulnerable to peer pressure, including abusing prescription drugs. *Seventeen* wants to inform our 13 million readers and their parents about this dangerous trend on the rise - why they should resist the peer pressure and how to get help if they are already struggling with addiction,” said Ann Shoket, editor-in-chief, *Seventeen* magazine. *Seventeen* reports in its March 2007 issue that over a third of teens say they feel some pressure to abuse prescription drugs, and nine percent say using prescription drugs to get high is an important part of fitting in with their friends.

ONDCP is calling on parents to educate themselves about the dangers of prescription drug abuse and talk to their teen about the risks. They can also take some concrete steps to protect their teen from prescription drug abuse:

- Keep track of quantities of prescription drugs in your own home, and the homes of relatives;
- Talk to the parents of your teen's friends and ensure they have the same policy in their home;
- Discard old and unused prescriptions;
- Set and enforce clear rules about drug use, including prescription drug abuse, and establish consequences; and
- Be observant and look for indications that your child may be abusing prescription drugs.

For more information about what parents can do and should know about prescription drug abuse, they can visit the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign's Web site for parents:

www.TheAntiDrug.com. The full report on “Teens and Prescription Drugs: Analysis of Recent Trends on the Emerging Drug Threat” can be accessed at <http://www.mediacampaign.org/teens/>.

Since its inception in 1998, the ONDCP's National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign has conducted outreach to millions of parents, teens and communities to prevent and reduce teen drug use. Counting on an unprecedented blend of public and private partnerships, non-profit community service organizations, volunteerism, and youth-to-youth communications, the Campaign is designed to reach Americans of diverse backgrounds with effective anti-drug messages.

For more information on the ONDCP National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, visit www.MediaCampaign.org