

PREScription DRUG USE ON THE RISE

INFORMATION FROM THE BALTIMORE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH 410-887-3828

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Non-medical use of prescription drugs is a growing problem in the U.S. among teens and adults. 80% of the world's pain pills are consumed in the United States, which has just 5% of the world's population. Every day, 2,500 young people use a prescription pain reliever to get high for the first time. Many teens believe that prescription drugs are safer to use than illegal drugs. Nearly half of teens who use prescription drugs say they get them from a relative or friend. The most highly abused drugs by youth are prescription pain medication, anti-anxiety or sleep medication, meds used to treat ADHD, and over-the-counter (OTC) cough or cold medicine. Personality changes, excessive drowsiness, confusion, difficulty walking and rapid eye movement may indicate signs of abuse.

Youth surveyed reported the following reasons why they abuse prescription and OTC drugs:

- Prescription drugs help them relax and cope with stress, depression, and anxiety.
- Prescription drugs help them deal with life's pressures, e.g. stimulants increase alertness and concentration in school. Others report abusing stimulants to help with weight control.
- Prescription drugs are a way to self-medicate to relieve pain or improve their sleep.

Because teens perceive prescription drugs as less harmful than street drugs, it's important that they understand that taking meds that are not prescribed for them can lead to addiction and other health problems. Also, taking too much of certain drugs can lead to overdose and death. Experts say the increase in heroin use is linked to prescription opioid abuse. Young people often become addicted to pain pills and progress to heroin — which provides the same euphoric high — when pills are hard to come by. It's important for parents to talk early and often with their children about the dangers of prescription drug abuse. For tips on how to have this conversation with your child, visit The Partnership at www.drugfree.org and www.StopMedicineAbuse.org

The 2013, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, indicate the following results concerning Baltimore County students:

Used prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription	Middle School	High School
One or more times during their life	6.9 %	14.8%
In the past 30 days	8.7%	8.6%
Used heroin one or more times during their life	2.4%	4.2%

Parents can, inadvertently, contribute to the prescription drug problem when they fail to discard their prescribed meds once they've recovered from an illness or injury. Acquiring prescription medications can be as easy for a teen as going into a parent's or family member's medicine cabinet, drawer or kitchen cupboard. Parents can limit their child's access and availability to prescription and over-the-counter drugs by taking certain precautions within their home and encouraging friends and other family members to do the same. Take inventory of your prescription and over-the-counter medicines; secure them in a safe place and dispose of unused, unwanted and expired medicine. Drug drop boxes are available outside of all Baltimore County Police precincts and are accessible 24/7.