



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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COUNTY OFFICIALS INFORM PARENTS ABOUT LATEST DRUG TREND *Warning for Parents: "Your Child's Drug Dealer Is Closer Than You Think"*

They get them at local markets, grocery stores, and pharmacies. They buy them online. However, the main source of prescription and over-the-counter drugs some teens are using to get high come from their own home.

"Your child's drug dealer is closer than you think," said Chairman Greg Cox, County of San Diego Board of Supervisors, at a news event outside a teen recovery center in South Bay where he unveiled the new "drug dealer" in town. "Your home's medicine cabinet is the newest drug dealer for teens."

Cox was joined by medical and treatment experts, community members and teens to inform parents about the latest drugs their children might be using to get high.

"The number of teens abusing prescription and over-the-counter drugs continues to rise. With school being out and summer just around the corner, we want to educate parents about the newest drugs teens are using to get high," added Cox.

National studies show increases in prescription and over the counter drug abuse. The reason? They are legal and easy to get.

According to a 2006 national survey, nearly 1 in 5 teens reported abusing prescription drugs and 1 in 10 teens said they used cough and cold medicines to get high. Girls are more likely than boys to intentionally abuse prescription drugs to get high. Among kids 12-17 years of age, 9.9 percent of girls abuse prescription drugs, compared with 8.2 percent of boys.

Locally, one indicator used to determine the prevalence of drug abuse is the percentage of San Diego county juvenile arrestees who admit to using drugs. In 2007 the San Diego Association of Governments began tracking prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse among juvenile arrestees. Its survey revealed that 33 percent of juvenile arrestees admitted using prescription drugs illegally while 30 percent admitted abusing over-the-counter drugs such as cold and cough medications.

Some teens might use these drugs to party and get high. Others are self-medicating to deal with problems such as stress and depression or to help them juggle schoolwork and other activities. While this trend has not been reflected in treatment programs throughout the county, officials believe this may soon change.



Chairman Cox (podium) and Nick Macchione at news conference.



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"It generally takes some time before drug abuse trends show up in treatment program admissions," said Nick Macchione, Director of the County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA). "We may see more local teens with these types of addictions in treatment in the coming years."

Some of the prescription medications most commonly abused by teens are painkillers, depressants and stimulants. There are serious health risks when abusing these drugs. A single dose of a painkiller can cause breathing difficulty that could lead to death. Stimulant abuse could lead to hostility or paranoia, and in the worst cases, it could lead to heart failure and fatal seizures.

Teens are also abusing over-the-counter medications, especially cough and cold medicines, because they contain dextromethorphan (dxm) which, when consumed in large quantities, can produce a "high." It can also cause dangerous side effects including confusion, dizziness, blurred vision, slurred speech, nausea, vomiting, and even death. When used in combination with other drugs such as alcohol and illegal drugs, the side effects can be more dangerous.

"Teens believe that prescription and over-the-counter drugs are safer to use than illegal drugs. They are wrong," said Marshall Lewis, M.D., Clinical Director, HHSA's Behavioral Health Services. "Prescription and over-the-counter drugs, especially painkillers and depressants, are every bit as dangerous as street drugs. A single large dose of these drugs can cause breathing difficulty that could result in death."

In the past seven years, three San Diego County teens, age 17, died of an overdose of prescription drugs not prescribed to them.

A national survey indicated that the number of emergency room visits involving prescription and over-the-

counter drugs rose 21 percent from 2004 to 2005. Nearly half were young people between 12 and 20 years of age. The continued use of these drugs often leads to addiction. Between 1995 and 2005, nationwide treatment admissions for abuse of prescription painkillers increased by more than 300 percent for people 12 and older.

How can you tell if your children are abusing these drugs?
Parents should be alert to personality changes, mood swings, irritability, excessive energy, sleepiness or avoiding sleep, sweating, loss of appetite or clumsiness.



Jenna Martinez overdosed on painkillers and almost died.

Also watch for signs around the house such as missing pills, unfamiliar pills, or empty cough and cold medicine bottles.

The most important thing parents can do is pay attention.



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Candy, triple-c, dex, dm, drex, red devils, robo, rojo, skittles, tussin, velvet, and vitamin d are some of the popular names teens use to refer to dextromethorphan or dxm, the common ingredient in more than 80 over-the-counter cold and cough medicines.

Those who abuse dxm to get high are sometimes called "syrup heads" and are said to be "dexing," "robotripping," "robodosing" or "skittling."

"Parents are the first line of defense against teens using drugs. I encourage them to get educated and talk to their children about the risks of using prescription and over-the-counter drugs to get high. Be alert. You can help close the door on the new drug dealer in town," Cox concluded.

Parents who believe their child might have a drug problem should call the County's Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339.

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