

Teens increasingly abuse prescription painkillers

19 October 2012, by Glenda Fautleroy



Today's teens and young people are abusing prescription painkillers more than any other age group or any other youth in history. Availability of these drugs from their parents' medicine cabinets may be to blame, according to new research in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Prescription painkillers are the second most abused drugs by adolescents in the U.S., only behind marijuana, reports the study. In fact, use of prescription painkillers by teens between the ages of 12 and 17 has jumped 10-fold since the 1960s.

"I think many [parents](#) just don't realize how dangerous unsecured [prescription drugs](#) are to their children and their children's friends," said lead author Richard Miech, Ph.D. of the University of Colorado in Denver.

Researchers used data from the National Survey on [Drug Use](#) and Health from 1985 to 2009 and analyzed the prevalence of nonmedical painkiller use for all [age groups](#), genders and races. They found that for youth born between 1980 and 1994, the use of painkillers was 40 percent higher than any other age group and any youth that came before them. This trend was present for both

genders and among Whites, Blacks and [Hispanics](#).

"The fact that the trend is present across all racial and ethnic groups [just] highlights that this is a problem that affects everyone," Miech said. The study concluded that one cause of the epidemic is the increasing availability of [prescription painkillers](#) in medicine cabinets at home. The researchers say more intervention is needed to make parents aware of the problem.

Ruth Gassman, Ph.D., executive director of the Indiana Prevention Resource Center in the Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington, said there are a variety of steps parents can take to limit children's access to these drugs.

"For instance, parents should keep track of the quantity of pills in a bottle and the frequency of refills," she said. "If you discover that you have to refill medication more often than anticipated, this may be a sign that someone is taking these medications without your knowledge."

Parents can also set clear rules for children about not sharing medicine and always following the prescribed dosage—and parents should also abide by these same rules, Gassman added.

"Ultimately I think we need to change attitudes toward prescription drugs and, hence, their demand," Miech said. "It's not an easy thing to do, but not doing it looks to be quite costly in terms of lost lives and productivity."

More information: Miech R, Bohnert A, Heard K, et al. Increasing use of nonmedical analgesics among younger cohorts in the United States: a birth cohort effect? *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Oct 16, 2012.

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