

Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#69 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers



Is your child abusing prescription drugs?

How to find out and what to do



• Available in Spanish and Chinese: call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health
• Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite nyc.gov/health
• 需要中文服務 - 可電 311 或造訪網址: nyc.gov/health



A surprising number of children abuse prescription medicines.

- About 1 in 5 teens nationwide has abused prescription drugs – more than have tried ecstasy, cocaine, crack or LSD.
- Prescription medications are now the second most frequently abused drugs among teens (after marijuana).
- Taking drugs without a prescription, or sharing prescriptions with someone else, is illegal.

Some commonly abused prescription medications:

- Painkillers (such as Vicodin, OxyContin, Darvon and Dilaudid)
- ADHD drugs (such as Ritalin, Adderal and Concerta)
- Diet pills (such as Adipex and Zantrex)
- Sedatives (such as Phenobarbitol and Seconal)
- Anti-anxiety drugs and tranquilizers (such as Xanax, Valium and Halcion).

Over-the-counter medicines can also be abused:

- Cough medicines that contain dextromethorphan (DXM)
- Sleeping pills and diet pills.

Prescription drugs are easy to get.

- Kids often get them from a friend or family member – or from a home medicine cabinet.
- Some buy them from strangers, or from pharmacy websites.



Nine good ways to keep your child off drugs

As a parent, you can make a big difference.

1. Take an active interest in your children's lives. Know what they're doing and who their friends are.
2. Spend time with them. Talk regularly about their activities and their goals for the future.
3. Monitor your kids' online activities.
4. Be aware of packages your kids receive.
5. Encourage kids to be active. Children who stay busy with school, sports, hobbies and community activities are much less likely to drink or use drugs.
6. Talk openly about drugs and alcohol. Set firm rules against substance abuse.
7. Don't let them smoke. Nicotine is a highly addictive drug, and kids who smoke are more likely to drink and use other drugs.
8. Set a good example! Children often do what their parents do. If you use drugs, your kids may think it's OK if they do, too.
9. Store prescription drugs where kids can't get them. Throw out old or unused medicines. Encourage your friends and family to do the same.

They are just as dangerous as street drugs.

- Many teens think prescription medicines are safe because doctors prescribe them. But these medicines can have the same effects as illicit drugs.
- Painkillers (such as OxyContin and Vicodin) are in the same class of narcotic drugs as heroin.
- Many common anti-anxiety drugs (such as Valium and Xanax) are strong sedatives.
- Like other drugs, prescription medications can lead to dependence and addiction.
- They can cause severe reactions, including hallucinations, seizures and heart problems.
- They can cause death in overdose, especially if they're mixed with alcohol or other drugs. *Kids often mix drugs and alcohol.*

How can I tell if my kids are using?

Learn the signs.

- Teenagers often act a little strange. It's a normal part of growing up.
- But if kids become too secretive, start lying or stealing, or exhibit extreme behaviors, it may be a signal that they are using drugs.
- Learn common slang terms for drugs (glossaries are available online). Zip, zoom and zay are not cartoon characters.

What to do if you suspect a problem.

- Talk with your child and share your concern.
- *Be calm.* Use a normal tone of voice. Even if you're angry, try not to let your emotions take over. Think before you talk.
- Ask direct questions about alcohol and drugs. If you have evidence, say so.
- Don't exaggerate the bad effects of drugs. Kids know when you're not telling the truth.
- Offer unconditional love and support. Tell your child you love him or her no matter what.





More Information and Help

- **New York City Health Department:**
Health Bulletins available through nyc.gov/health or call 311:
 - #66 Marijuana—Is It Holding You Back?
 - #63 How to Make Your Home Smoke-Free
 - #61 Help to Stop Using: Drug Problems Can Be Treated
 - #53 Healthy Parenting
 - #48 How Much Is Too Much? (Alcohol)
 - #46 Still Smoking? Cigarettes Are Eating You Alive
- **LifeNet (help with substance abuse or mental health problems):**
Call 311 or 800-LifeNet (800-543-3638)
 - Spanish LifeNet: 311 or 1-877-AYUDESE (877-298-3373)
 - Asian LifeNet (Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean): 311 or 877-990-8585
- **Pills Anonymous:** www.pillsanonymous.org
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse:** www.drugabuse.gov
- **Partnership for a Drug-Free America:** www.drugfree.org
- **The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign:** www.theantidrug.com
- **CALL 911 in any medical emergency.**

**DIAL
311**

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For Non-Emergency New York City Services
Telephone Interpretation in More Than 170 Languages