

Local Anti-Drug Coalition Urges Community to Take Action Against Teen Cough Medicine Abuse

The latest and among the most dangerous drug abuse problems has arisen among teens and is creeping across America, affecting communities like ours everywhere. There are codenames for it: Skittles, Robo Tripping, Triple C's, Dex, Tussin, Vitamin D" to mention a few. And it is the practice of getting high by taking excessive doses of over-the-counter (OTC) cough medications. These are the same remedies that we commonly stock in our medicine cabinets, and are readily available in drugstores and supermarkets everywhere.

The "high" is caused by dextromethorphan, known familiarly as DXM, and is an active ingredient in more than 100 nonprescription cough syrups, tablets, and gel caps like Dimetapp DM, Robitussin, Sudafed and Vicks 44. A normal dose of cough medicine is 15-30 milligrams. Remarkably, kids are sometimes ingesting 25-50 Times the recommended doses.

DXM, when used as directed, has a long history of being safe and effective. However, when taken in large doses, it can produce a hallucinogenic high, along with dangerous side effects, caused by the DXM itself or other active ingredients in the medicine. Among them are stomach pain and heart problems, as well as delusions, depression, high blood pressure, hot/cold flashes, loss of consciousness, nausea and vomiting, numbness, rashes, and seizures.

Certainly as a community, we want to ensure that OTC cough and cold medicines containing DXM remain accessible to those who need them. However, the potential for abuse among youth demands our immediate attention.

Authorities tell us the DXM overdoses typically occur in clusters, as word about the "high" spreads in a community's middle and high schools. According to a recent study, its estimated that one out of 10 people aged 12 to 17 – that's 2.4 million kids from any background say that they have taken cough remedies to get high.

It is vital that adults, particularly parents be aware of the possible signs of abuse. A red flag should be raised if you see your child making frequent purchases of OTC cough preparations from the same or different stores, or from the internet; hides cough medicine bottles in his/her bedroom; is exhibiting odd behavior; has declining grades; a loss of interest in friends and activities; or is experiencing hallucinations and/or any of the side effects mentioned above.

Be vigilant about your medicine cabinets. Know what's in there, keep track of your medicines, and discard OTC and prescription medications that you don't need. If you suspect a problem immediately contact a local substance abuse prevention/intervention professional. Action for the Betterment of the Community and Community Prevention can also direct you toward help at 347-2991

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