

## **The Enemy in Your Medicine Cabinet**

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Parents stop stressing about cocaine; worry less about heroin. The drugs your teen is more likely to abuse may be right in your medicine cabinet and available with or without prescription. Kids call it "pharming" – the practice of getting high on supersize doses of over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.

Doctors, emergency rooms and counselors are reporting that kids as young as grade five – that's 10 and 11 year olds – are getting high on super size doses of dextro-methorphan (DXM), a cough suppressant found in many over-the-counter (OTC) cold remedies. Robitussin, Coricidin Cold and Cough (Triple C) and Contac; anything with "DM" or "tussin" in the brand name is a target for abuse. Because they are legal and not monitored, most grocers, pharmacies and department stores allow anyone to purchase OTC's without question. Also because they are legal – parents and their youth assume that they are "safe".

Many kids will ingest 8-16 or even 24 tablets or consume an entire bottle of liquid the first time they use it and, depending on what else they are taking, the first time can be fatal. The exact number of kids abusing is unknown, but calls to the national poison centers jumped from 50 teen calls a month in the late 1`990s to over 300 per month by the end of 2001.

Along with the over-the-counter (OTC) medications, a new report by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University found that

between 1992 and 2003 prescription drug abuse tripled among people aged 12-17 and nearly doubled among adults, trumping illicit drugs such as cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants and heroin. Researchers said the increase is due largely to the ease of accessibility through the Internet and household medicine cabinets, and a perception that the drugs are safe even when abused.

An "innocent supplier" might be the family's medicine cabinet containing a prescription of Valium or a pain medication like Oxycontin. Counselors have reported youth talking about visiting friends or other family members and checking out the "cabinet" and "taking a few" of whatever they find; often not even aware of what they are taking. Very few individuals count and know how many pills are in a prescription, let alone how many are left. And, kids know that. Not only are they taking the meds themselves, but there is a street value for some prescription drugs.

For example, OxyContin (oxycodone hydrochloride), known on the street as Oxy, Oxycotton and Hillbilly Heroin, is prescribed for treatment of moderate to severe pain. OxyContin sells on the street for about \$1 per mg and when crushed, inhaled or injected, produces a short term high similar to that of heroin. Oxycodone is a Schedule II Controlled Substance. Federal penalties for simple possession begin with a fine of a minimum of \$1000 and jail time.

So, what's a parent supposed to do? Here are some steps you can take to protect yourself and your kids:

1. Know your stuff- educate yourself about the dangers of drugs popular with your child's friends.
2. Watch for warning signs – note any changes in behavior, new friends, altered sleeping patterns, extreme mood swings, declining grades
3. Check the trash – look for empty packets of cold and cough medications, prescription bottles
4. Keep prescription drugs somewhere safe, maybe even lock them up
5. Know what you have and discard all "old" medications
6. Talk to your child – frequently. And keep talking. Kids who learn about drug risks at home are about 50% less likely to try drugs.

A great source of information and action in Jackson County is the local Drug-Free Council which meets on the second Thursday of each month, 11:30-1:00, at the Covered Bridge Campus, west Hwy 50, in Seymour. The Council is made up of concerned individuals from around Jackson County who investigate and develop strategic plans to address ATOD (alcohol, tobacco and other drug) use and abuse in Jackson County. Annually, they receive grant applications from organizations and agencies who provide services to address these issues and serve as the local "grassroots" advisory body to the Governor's Commission for a Drug Free Indiana. Tom Rothring is the Coalition Director and may be reached at 524-7224.