

A Parent's Guide to...

Preventing Teen Cough Medicine Abuse



Partnership for a Drug-Free America®

If you suspect a poisoning, call your local poison control center at 1.800.222.1222.

To learn more about drug prevention and to support the Partnership, visit www.drugfree.org/dxm.

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Consumer Healthcare Products Association

What Every Parent Needs to Know About Cough Medicine Abuse

Some young people are abusing over-the-counter (OTC) medicines containing dextromethorphan (DXM). While abuse of these products is not widespread, every parent should be aware of the facts about DXM.

Q: What is DXM?

DXM is a safe and effective cough suppressant ingredient found in OTC cough medicines. When used according to directions, products containing DXM produce few side effects and have a long history of safety and effectiveness.

Some teens are attempting to get high by taking much larger than recommended doses of DXM in the form of OTC cough syrup, tablets, and gel caps.

Q: What are the effects of DXM abuse?

The effects of DXM abuse vary with the amount taken. Common effects include confusion, dizziness, double or blurred vision, slurred speech, impaired physical coordination, abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, rapid heart beat, drowsiness, numbness of fingers and toes, and disorientation. DXM abusers describe different “plateaus” ranging from mild distortions of color and sound to visual hallucinations and “out-of-body,” dissociative sensations, and loss of motor control.

DXM also is sometimes abused in combination with other medications, alcohol, and illegal drugs, which can increase the dangerous side effects.



Q: What products contain DXM?

There are well over 100 OTC products that contain DXM. Some examples include Alka-Seltzer Plus Cold & Cough Medicine, Coricidin HBP Cough and Cold, Dayquil LiquiCaps, Dimetapp DM, Robitussin cough products, Sudafed cough products, Triaminic cough syrups, Tylenol Cold products, Vicks 44 Cough, and Vicks NyQuil LiquiCaps. There also are a number of store brands that contain DXM. To know if a product contains DXM, look for dextromethorphan in the active ingredient section of the label.

Q: What are slang terms for dextromethorphan?

Slang terms for dextromethorphan vary by product and region. The most common terms include: Dex, DXM, Robo, Skittles, Syrup, Triple-C, and Tussin. Terms for using dextromethorphan include: Robo-ing, Robo-tripping, and Skittling.

Q: How common is DXM abuse?

There is currently no adequate prevalence information on DXM abuse; however, abuse of cough medicines containing DXM is described as sporadic by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and is estimated to be low compared to other drugs.

There is little in current teen culture—music, movies, fashion, and entertainment—that promotes or even mentions cough medicine abuse. The one exception is the Internet.

Q: What types of DXM sites are found online?

A number of web sites promote the abuse of DXM. The information on these sites ranges from recommending how much to take, suggesting other drugs to combine with DXM, instructing how to extract DXM from cough medicines, and even selling a powder form of DXM for snorting. Other sites display art, movies, and music produced by people promoting DXM and other forms of drug abuse. You should be aware of what your teen is doing on the Internet, the web sites he or she visits, and the amount of time he or she is logged on.

What Parents Can Do to Prevent Drug Abuse

Parents can make a positive difference in their teens' lives. Research has shown that parents can influence their teens' decisions about drugs.

Monitoring is an effective way you can help your teen stay drug-free, and an important thing to do even if you don't suspect your teen is using drugs. Monitoring means asking young people questions about where they're going, what they're doing, and with whom they're spending time, as well as keeping tabs on their Internet use by using web browser tools and software designed to block certain sites. Put some of these tips to use, and your kids will benefit with healthy lifestyles.

Talk with Your Teen

Kids who say they learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to try drugs. Parents should talk often, listen regularly, and communicate clearly that they do not want their kids using drugs. Remember: Your teen is counting on you to be the grown-up.



To talk credibly and effectively about the dangers of drugs, parents need to know what they are. Teens will know when they're being lied to, so know the facts. To learn about the various drugs teens can abuse—including DXM—and their risks, visit the Drug Resource at www.drugfree.org.

Know Where Your Teen Is

It's important to know where your teen is and what he or she is doing. Research has shown that children without adult supervision are at significantly greater risk of truancy from school, stress, receiving poor grades, risk-taking behavior, and substance abuse.

Get Your Teen Involved in Activities

Research has shown that youths who participate in team sports are less likely to use marijuana than those who do not participate. Find out what adult-supervised activities—like after-school sports or clubs—interest your teen and help get him or her involved.

Know Your Teen's Friends

Research from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America® reports that more than half of teens say they have close friends who get high regularly. Are these the close friends your teen hangs out with?



Recognize Signs Your Teen Is Using Drugs

Parents don't always recognize their kids might be using drugs. While it can be hard to know, there are some general warning signs you can watch for. The fact is, any teen could be using drugs, so stay alert. As a general rule, changes that are sudden or extreme may be a warning sign.

Signs your teen could be using drugs:

- Change in friends
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns
- Changes in physical appearance and hygiene
- Declining grades
- Loss of interest in hobbies or favorite activities
- Hostile and uncooperative attitude
- Unexplained disappearance of household money
- Visits to pro-drug web sites
- Empty drug or medicine containers or drug paraphernalia
- Unusual chemical or medicinal smells on your child or in his or her room

Helping a Child Who Is Using Drugs

Sit down with your child for an open discussion about alcohol and drug use. Openly voice your suspicions to your child but avoid direct accusations. Do not have this conversation when your child is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, and make sure you sound calm and rational. Ask your child what's been going on in his or her life. Discuss ways to avoid using alcohol and other drugs in the future. If you need help during this conversation, ask another family member, your child's guidance counselor, or physician.

Be firm and enforce whatever discipline you've laid out in the past for breaking house rules. You also should discuss ways your child can regain your lost trust: calling in, spending evenings at home, or improving grades.

If you think your child needs professional help, your doctor, hospital, or school nurse or counselor may be able to help. Or you can call 1.800.662.HELP or visit <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>, the treatment locator hotline and web site of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Be Pro-Active

Drug use is a choice, but it is a choice you can influence. For example, teens report one of the greatest risks related to smoking pot is upsetting their parents. Parents need to talk with—not at—their teens about the dangers of using drugs. So, monitor your teen's time, friends, and activities, even if you don't think your teen is using drugs.