



WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT COUGH MEDICINE ABUSE

You already know about the dangers of illegal street drugs like marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamine. But did you know that some teens are abusing legal products like cough medicine, to get high?

Q: What is cough medicine abuse?

Cough medicine abuse is taking extremely large doses of cough medicine to get high. The "high" is caused by taking a large amount of dextromethorphan, which is often abbreviated DXM, a common active ingredient found in many cough medications. This sort of abuse -- whether it's called cough medicine abuse, or dextromethorphan, or DXM abuse -- can be dangerous.

Q: What is dextromethorphan?

Dextromethorphan is a safe and effective active ingredient found in many nonprescription cough syrups, tablets, and gel caps. When used accordingly to medicine label directions, the ingredient dextromethorphan produces few side effects and has a long history of safety. When abused in large amounts, it can produce a "high" feeling as well as a number of dangerous side effects.

Q: What are the effects of cough medicine abuse?

The effects of the abuse of cough medicines containing dextromethorphan vary with the amount taken. Common effects include confusion, dizziness, double or blurred vision, slurred speech, loss of 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, "out-of-body" dissociative sensations, and loss of motor control. Side effects can be worsened if the dextromethorphan-containing cough medicine being abused also contains other ingredients to treat more than just coughs.

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

Q: What cough medicines contain dextromethorphan, or DXM?

There are well over 100 OTC medicines that contain dextromethorphan, either as the only active ingredient or in combination with other active ingredients. 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 Relief products and Vicks NyQuil Liqui-Caps. 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 OTC Drug Facts label.

Q: What are slang terms for dextromethorphan?

Slang terms for dextromethorphan vary by product and region. Adults should be familiar with the most common terms, which include Dex, DXM, Robo, Skittles, Syrup, Triple-C, and Tussin. Terms for using dextromethorphan include: Robo-tripping, and Skittling, among others.



Q: How common is cough medicine abuse?

Recent research indicates that the abuse of DXM cough medicine is a greater problem than previously thought. The research shows that one out of 10 teens, or over two million teens, from across the country and of all backgrounds, has abused cough medicine to get high. Often, these teens are finding information about cough medicine abuse and effects of dextromethorphan on the Internet.

Q: Where are teens finding information about cough medicine abuse?

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.

A number of disreputable web sites promote the abuse of cough medicines containing dextromethorphan. The information on these sites includes recommending how much to take, suggesting other drugs to combine with DXM, instructing how to extract DXM from cough medicines, promoting drug abuse in general, and even selling a powder form of dextromethorphan for snorting. You should be aware of what your teen is doing on the Internet, the web sites he or she visits, and the amount of the time he or she is logged on.