

# Teens turn to cough syrup to get high, feds say

## Prescription abuse rising; alcohol, illegal drug use down, government finds

WASHINGTON - Teens increasingly are getting high with legal drugs like painkillers and mood stimulants, and they're turning to cough syrup as well, says a government survey released Thursday.

The annual study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, conducted by the University of Michigan, showed mixed results in the nation's longtime campaign against teen drug abuse.

It found that while fewer teens overall drank alcohol or used illegal drugs in the last year, a small but growing number were popping prescription painkillers like OxyContin and Vicodin and



As many as one in every 14 high school seniors said they used cold medicine "fairly recently" to get high, the study found.

It was the first year that the government tracked the frequency of teens who reported getting high from over-the-counter medicine for coughs and colds.

"It's bad that kids are buying cough syrup and using it this way — it's not good for them," said John P. Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

The study found about one in 10 high school seniors have abused the painkiller Vicodin and Walters said kids may be pilfering the pills from their parents' medicine cabinets.

"That is one thing you can do — take the pills that are no longer being used and throw them away, get rid of them," he said in an interview.

The rise in prescription drug abuse was a troubling conclusion in a study that Walters described as good news overall because of the drop in teen use of alcohol, cigarettes, mari-

### Cough syrup buzz

That teens are turning to cough syrup to get high is particularly alarming, experts said, because the medicine is cheap and easy to get. Moreover, few people — teens and their parents alike — recognize the dangers of overdosing on the otherwise safe and legal drugs.

