

WHERE DO TEENS GET Rx DRUGS?

You used to worry about your teen getting involved with illegal drugs. But the new drug threat to teens today is likely to be in your house already ... and you might not think it's dangerous at all.

Teens are taking prescription pain relievers and over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold medicines just to get high. And they're getting them easily from their own homes, or the homes of other relatives and friends. In fact, nearly half (47%) of teens say they get prescription drugs for free from a relative or friend. Ten percent say they buy pain relievers from a friend or relative, and another 10 percent say they took drugs without asking.¹

While it can be very tricky to monitor for this type of abuse, parents can do it and here's how! Following is a list of common places teens can get prescription and OTC drugs, as well as some specific advice on how to protect them from this type of drug abuse.

YOUR HOME

A teen will often scout his own home first if he's looking for a quick high from prescription or OTC drugs. Think carefully about the pills that are in your family's medicine cabinet. Do you have cough syrups? Vicodin for that bad back? Xanax for those panic attacks? These are just a few examples. And, tech-gadgets such as computers, cell phones, and personal digital assistants (PDAs) can help teens gain access to the Internet, where they can readily order prescription drugs WITHOUT a prescription from rogue pharmacy sites or message with "friends" about obtaining drugs.

The Medicine Cabinet: Take inventory of every place in your home where you keep medicines, both prescription and OTC drugs. Ideally, you should keep these drugs in one location that you can monitor easily, where your teen cannot access them at all. If you choose to leave them more open, be sure to note the pill amounts in each bottle or pill packet, just as you would monitor the level of alcohol in the house, as well as number of refills. If you notice pills are dwindling faster than they should, be on alert, and talk with your teen. If you have unneeded or expired medications, **properly dispose of them** by putting them in a bag or container, and mixing them with something unappealing, like kitty litter or coffee grounds. Then throw the bag in the trash. For environmental reasons, never flush any medications down the toilet or drain, unless the prescription bottle specifically says you can.

The Internet: Some teens turn to sources outside of the home to buy Rx drugs. They can surf the Internet for illegal pharmacies that are NOT legitimate, and often send prescribed drugs without a medical doctor's prescription. Teens can easily access these Web sites using their computer, a cell phone with Internet capabilities, or a personal digital assistant (PDA). In addition, teens can access numerous Web sites that give step-by-step instructions on how much of a medicine they can take in order to get a "high" feeling. Social networking sites allow teens the ability to share information, which can also facilitate risky behaviors. Be vigilant and regularly monitor devices that give your teen access to the Internet. Check Web site histories and cookies, as well as cell phone call histories. Contact the manufacturer of the device for help on how to do this, if you don't already know. It is also helpful to limit your teen's time on these gadgets and keep them in family common areas. For

more information on how to monitor your teen's use of digital technologies, **visit the Teens & Technology** section of this site (<http://www.theantidrug.com/E-Monitoring/index.asp>).

Your Teen's Personal Effects: There is a fine line between respecting your teen's privacy and making sure they are not engaging in risky behaviors, like prescription and OTC drug abuse. If you suspect your teen is engaging in this type of abuse, there are specific things that will be red flags. If you find your teen is going through a lot of cough syrup, be on alert. When monitoring your own medications, if you notice anything missing, this is a tell-tale sign. Of course, empty prescription bottles or empty pill cartridges among your teen's personal effects are also tell-tale signs. Talk with your child immediately. Impress upon him the **health risks** associated with prescription and OTC drug abuse and establish firm rules and consequences. If you already have established rules about drug abuse, enforce the consequences.

A FRIEND OR RELATIVE'S HOME

Whether it's your friend or your child's friend, talk with the parents of the household about monitoring medications in their home, especially if your child is a frequent guest. Discuss what you do in your own home, and encourage them to take similar safety precautions. If other parents hear you talk about the new risks of prescription drugs and how you monitor the use of these drugs in your home, they'll understand. Ask other parents to notify you immediately if they suspect anything unusual. Also, request that they not give your child any medications without your permission. The same set of guidelines apply to a relative or other caregiver's home, especially if they are elderly, such as grandparents. Many seniors are on medications for chronic, long-term conditions and sometimes don't monitor pill amounts closely. They often have a number of expired medications. Offer to help them take inventory and properly dispose of expired medications. Talk to them about your concerns and ask if they will help you monitor. Finally, don't allow your teen to go to anyone's home if there's not going to be adult supervision. "Pharming" or pill-swapping is becoming a popular, yet very dangerous, trend among teens, and it most often occurs when adults are absent or don't regularly check in during a social gathering. Pharming often occurs at parties, at school, and general social situations. If you are the person supervising a get together, then regularly check-in and be in tune with what is going on.

*"Somebody showed up [to school] with some, a lot, and just started handing [pills] out like candy," said Chuck Brawler, chief of police for the Spring Branch school district. "It was just kind of a grab bag. They didn't know what they were taking. It was a bad mistake." **As reported by the Dallas Morning News.***

SCHOOL

Teens often get prescription and/or OTC drugs from their friends at school or similar social situations. Most school administrators and teachers are very aware of the problem, but be sure--talk directly with your child's teachers and any other school officials who come in contact with your teen throughout the day, such as a counselor or coach. Request that they notify you immediately if they notice anything unusual or suspect your teen is abusing medications.

GROCERY OR DRUG STORE

Stores and retail chains in several states are now required to place pseudoephedrine (i.e., Sudafed) behind-the-counter as a result of the Combat Methamphetamine Act. Other stores, although not required by state law, are proactively putting certain OTC drugs behind-the-counter. In fact, to help curb cough syrup abuse, many stores and retail chains have even begun placing products containing DXM behind-the-counter, as well. Grocery and drug stores also limit the number of bottles and/or tablets that can be purchased, but teens often get around this by store-hopping.

If you have reason to suspect your teen is abusing OTC drugs, be on the lookout for grocery receipts, empty bottles of cough syrup or pill packets among personal effects, and be aware if they tend to hit the grocery store before heading out with friends.

¹2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, SAMHSA, 2006. Detailed Table: 7.53 B.