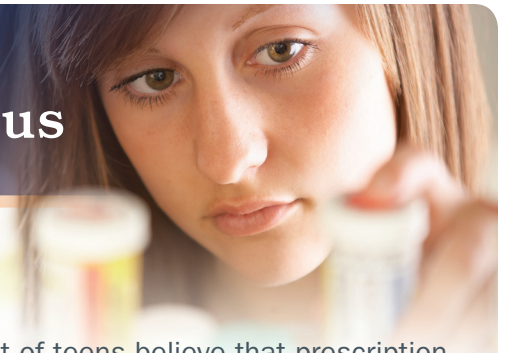


Fact Sheet:

Prescription Drug Abuse – A DEA Focus



- In 2008, there were 6.2 million Americans aged 12 years and older who abused prescription drugs* for non-medical purposes within the past month—more than the number of people who are abusing cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, and inhalants, combined.
- Prescription drugs are new drug abusers' drugs of choice. In 2008, on average, 6,000 persons per day abused prescription pain relievers for the first time. The total number of individuals that initiate with any controlled substance pharmaceutical for the first time far exceeds the number of individuals that abuse marijuana for the first time.
- Every day, on average, 2,500 teens use prescription drugs to get high for the first time.
- 1 in 7 teens admit to abusing prescription drugs to get high in the past year. Sixty percent of teens who abused prescription pain relievers did so before the age of 15.
- Fifty-six percent of teens believe that prescription drugs are easier to get than illicit drugs.
- 2 in 5 teens believe that prescription drugs are “much safer” than illegal drugs. And 3 in 10 teens believe that prescription pain relievers are not addictive.
- Sixty-three percent of teens believe that prescription drugs are easy to get from the medicine cabinets of family and friends.
- According to the Center for Disease Control, prescription drugs, including opioids and antidepressants, are responsible for more overdose deaths than “street drugs” such as cocaine, heroin, and amphetamines.
- DEA works closely with the medical community to help them recognize drug abuse and signs of diversion, and relies on their input and due diligence to combat diversion. Unfortunately egregious drug violations by practitioners do sometimes occur—fortunately doctor involvement in illegal drug activity is rare. When violations do occur, DEA will pursue criminal, civil, and administrative actions against such practitioners as warranted, however, on average, DEA only arrests approximately 85 of the more than 796,000 registered medical doctors and doctors of osteopathic medicine.

May 2009

* Prescription drugs refer to controlled substance pharmaceuticals controlled under federal law enforced by the DEA.

See the educational, interactive exhibit *Good Medicine, Bad Behavior: Drug Diversion in America*.
On exhibit at the DEA Museum through 2010.



Drug Enforcement Administration
MUSEUM
& VISITORS CENTER
Pentagon City • Arlington, VA

Phone: 202-307-3463

Fax: 202-307-8956

www.goodmedicinebadbehavior.org