



# What parents (and grandparents) need to know about prescription opioid painkillers

The largest source of easily available and 'free' abused medications are the billions of prescription pills readily accessible in home medicine cabinets. Some are powerful opioid pain medications that can be attractive to young people, who can take them without parents knowing — contributing to an epidemic of opioid abuse and dependence, overdose and potential loss of life.

The majority of people including teens and other young people who abuse prescription medications access them from medicine cabinets in their, or other's homes.

It's important to find an area in your home where you can lock up all your medications, including those prescribed for pets. Store medications in a locked cabinet, drawer, or toolbox or purchase child-proof lock boxes.

Parents and grandparents should also be aware that up to 20% of childhood prescription drug poisonings involve a grandparent's medication. Grandparents often have prescription bottles that are not child-resistant or loose pills out on tables, kitchen counters or in purses or pockets.

## What if a prescriber wants to write an opioid pain medication for your child or teenager?

Prescription opioids are powerful highly addictive medications. It's important that the conversation with your child's physician include questions about whether use of an alternate non-opioid painkiller can be recommended for non-cancer pain. Research has shown that non-opioid pain medications are just as effective as opioids for most pain. If an opioid painkiller is needed for your child or teen, talk with your doctor about limiting the duration of therapy.

## Understand how opioid painkiller addiction can lead to heroin addiction

Too often communities, especially those in rural and suburban areas, are shocked by the number of young people tragically dying from heroin overdose. A renowned medical facility recently explained that nearly half of the patients being treated for heroin addiction in their clinic started with an opioid painkiller prescription. These opioid pain medications can create dependency very quickly which can lead to addiction. Once addicted, an individual may have difficulty getting a continuing supply of the painkiller, and switches to heroin which is now easily accessible and relatively inexpensive. Parents may never imagine their child using heroin especially using a needle, but heroin is now commonly smoked or snorted doing away with any need for syringes.

## "Pharming Parties" - fact or fiction

Often talked about in the media 'Pharming' refers to a gathering where attendees bring prescription pills they can access from their own, relative's and friend's medicine cabinets. These pills are said to either be traded or poured into a bowl which attendees can take to achieve a recreational, but very dangerous 'high'. Proof of the actual extent of these 'Pharming' parties is unverified. However some teens buy, 'borrow' or trade these prescription medications that may ultimately lead to dependency or addiction. In 2013, 15.0 percent of high school seniors used a prescription drug non-medically in the past year.

### Communicate

Talk to your kids and teens

Talk to their grandparents

Let your teens know you're aware of the problem

Warn them that taking a prescribed drug that wasn't provided for their medical care is just as dangerous as taking illegal street drugs

Discuss the dangers of mixing multiple types of drugs or using drugs with alcohol

Explain how painkillers are made from opioids, which is similar to heroin

Monitor computers

Keep all computers and laptops in open areas such as living rooms and family rooms, as well as closely monitor children's online activities

Secure any painkillers, sleep medications or stimulants in a locked drawer or container

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