

# Regional Advisory Board (RAB) of Community Anti-Drug Coalitions

November 2020 Newsletter

## **Did you know?**

**Purple heroin – the new opioid drug.** The drug consists of the synthetic opioid fentanyl, acetaminophen and a new drug called bromphine, among other substances. The name “purple heroin” comes from the drug’s purple hue. Bromphine is a relatively new fentanyl alternative, first cited in a scientific report in 2018. Bromphine is a strong synthetic opioid that is not authorized for any medical uses. Bromphine overdoses should respond to normal naloxone dosing. Bromphine is structurally different from fentanyl, and it is not easily discernible in normal hospital blood tests. Bromphine has been connected to multiple overdoses and one death in Michigan, as well as seven deaths in other states. Overdose symptoms include: blue nails or lips; confusion; lethargy nausea and vomiting; small pupils; snoring respirations; slow breathing; respiratory arrest; and cardiac arrest. (Indiana State Department of Health, 10/20/2020)

**Women have increased their heavy drinking episodes during the COVID-19 pandemic,** a new study suggests. Between the spring of 2019 and the spring of 2020, women increased their heavy drinking episodes — defined as four or more drinks within several hours — by 41%, researchers report in JAMA Network Open. The study found the overall frequency of alcohol consumption rose by 14% among adults over age 30, compared with the same time last year. Natalie Crawford of Emory University told NBC News that women may be drinking more during the pandemic because they often “bear the brunt of parenting, caring for children and the family.” She added, “We really don’t have a good understanding of what happens when we are in social isolation for such an extensive period of time.” (drugfree.org, 10/1/20)

**Characteristics of Drug Overdose Deaths Involving Opioids and Stimulants** — 24 States and the District of Columbia, January–June 2019. A recent paper published by the CDC utilized data from the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System. The study found that in recent years, the factors of overdose deaths have changed from being caused by one particular drug to involving several substances. Approximately 80% of overdose deaths involved opioids, and three out of four of those deaths also involved illicitly manufactured fentanyls (IMFs). About 85% of all deaths included other illicit drugs: heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines. (Indiana State Department of Health, 10/6/2020)

**The misuse of fentanyl, heroin and nonprescribed opioids is increasing, potentially due to the COVID-19 pandemic,** according to a new study. Researchers from the Quest Diagnostics Health Trends study say the rise in drug misuse may be due to the pandemic’s impact on health care access and support for people most at risk for substance use disorder. The researchers analyzed more than

872,000 nationwide lab results. The study found among individuals tested, the drug positivity rate rose 35% for nonprescribed fentanyl and 44% for heroin during the pandemic compared to the period before the pandemic. Nonprescribed opioids rose 10%. (drugfree.org, 10/15/20)

**The number of college-age Americans who are choosing not to consume alcohol is increasing.** Researchers at the University of Michigan School of Nursing found the number of adults ages 18 to 22 who abstained from drinking alcohol rose from 20% in 2002 to 28% in 2018, CNN reports. Among young adults 18 to 22 who were not students, 30% did not drink, the study found. Alcohol use disorder among all young adults in this age group decreased by about half during the study period. The study found the number of young adults using marijuana, either alone or with alcohol, has increased. (drugfree.org, 10/22/20)

**Purdue Pharma, maker of the prescription opioid OxyContin, agreed on Wednesday to plead guilty to criminal charges over the company's role in the nation's opioid crisis,** The New York Times reports. The company faces \$8.3 billion in penalties. Members of the Sackler family, which owns Purdue Pharma, have agreed to pay \$225 million in civil penalties. The settlement could hasten a resolution of thousands of lawsuits brought by states, cities, counties and tribes against the company for its role in the opioid crisis, the article notes. Because Purdue sought bankruptcy court protection in the midst of these lawsuits, it is unlikely the company will pay anything close to the \$8.3 billion negotiated, according to the New York Times. The settlement with Purdue Pharma is separate from thousands of opioid-related lawsuits against other drug makers, drug distributors and pharmacy chains. Those cases are still pending in federal and state courts. (drugfree.org, 10/15/20)

**Drug overdose deaths increased 10% during the first three months of this year,** the CDC indicates. The CDC estimates that if this trend continues, there will be more than 75,500 drug-related deaths in the United States this year, NPR reports. The largest percentage increase in overdose deaths occurred in rural South Dakota, which saw a 50% rise. Drug-related deaths are occurring as the pandemic curbs the ability of many addiction treatment programs to provide services, the article notes. The pandemic is not entirely to blame for the increase in deaths, NPR notes. The rapid spread of fentanyl also has played a role. The drug can be deadly when it is laced with other illegal street drugs. (drugfree.org, 10/22/20)

**A new study finds almost one-third of high school seniors who reported misusing prescription opioids but did not receive a prescription for the drugs ended up using heroin by age 35.** Researchers at the University of Michigan also found 21% of high school seniors who misused prescription opioids and later received an opioid prescription used heroin by age 35. (drugfree.org, 10/22/20)

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