

While millions of Americans rely on over-the-counter (OTC) medicines containing the cough suppressant ingredient dextromethorphan (DXM), availability of the medication is a way for teens to get high. Since OTC cough medicines are more readily available and more affordable than prescription or illicit drugs, teens may believe they are less dangerous and intentionally take large amounts of DXM—sometimes more than 25x the recommended dosage—or purchase it in pill or powder form (such as Coricidin HBP Cough and Cold tablets) and snort or inject it. With studies showing that roughly 1 in 4 teenagers knows someone who has abused OTC cough medicine to get high, parents need to understand the risks these medications can pose.

DXM Side Effects

When abused, DXM can cause side effects that could lead to accidents and bodily harm, including: nausea and vomiting; stomach pain; confusion; dizziness; double or blurred vision; slurred speech; impaired physical coordination; rapid heartbeat; high blood pressure; drowsiness; numbness of fingers and toes; disorientation; and hallucinations. DXM intoxication can last anywhere from 30 minutes to 6 hours after taking it.

Additionally, many DXM-containing OTC medicines also contain ingredients such as antihistamines, analgesics, or decongestants. High doses of these combination medicines can significantly increase the risk of harmful effects such as potentially fatal liver injury, cardiovascular effects, and over-sedation. OTC cough medicine is also sometimes mixed with other drugs, alcohol, and even energy drinks, which can cause additional harmful effects.

Warning Signs of OTC Cough Medicine Abuse:

- Empty cough medicine boxes/bottles in trash of child's room or in child's backpack or school locker;
- Purchase or use of large amounts of cough medicine when not ill;
- Missing boxes or bottles of medicine from home medicine cabinets;
- Hearing your child use certain slang terms for DXM abuse, such as skittles, skittling, tussin, robo-tripping, robo, CCC, triple Cs, and dexting;
- Visiting pro-drug websites that provide information on how to abuse DXM;

- Internet orders, the arrival of unexpected packages, or unexplained payments by credit card/PayPal;
- Changes in friends, physical appearance, or sleeping or eating patterns;
- Declining grades or loss of interest in hobbies or favorite activities;
- Hostile and uncooperative attitude;
- Unexplained disappearance of household money; and
- Unusual chemical or medicinal smells on your child or in his or her room.

How to Help Prevent Medicine Abuse:

- **TALK** to your teen about OTC cough medicine abuse. Teens who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are 50% less likely to use drugs.
- **MONITOR** your medicine cabinets and your teen's activities. Take inventory of what medicines you have and how much you have of them, so you will know if anything is missing. Be aware of what your teen does on the Internet, the websites they visit, and the amount of time they spend online. There are websites and online communities promoting DXM abuse with instructions on how to achieve certain levels of highs.
- **SHARE** what you have learned with other parents and community leaders.

For more information, please visit our website at drugfreeadamscounty.org.