

# Students Should Know the Facts

## Heroin and Prescription Opioids are a Serious Problem

Prescription drug misuse occurs when a person takes a prescription medication that is not prescribed for him/her, or takes it for reasons or in dosages other than as prescribed. The nonmedical use of prescription medications has increased in the past decade and has surpassed all illicit drug usage except marijuana in the United States. Misuse of prescription drugs can produce serious health effects, including addiction. One of the most striking aspects of the misuse of prescription medications has been the increase in painkiller abuse, which can lead to heroin use.

- Prescription analgesic overdoses killed nearly 15,000 people in the US in 2008, more than three times the 4,000 killed by these medications in 1999. (*CDC Vital Signs 11/2011*)
- Young adults ages 18 - 24 are particularly at risk, with increases in heroin/opioid admissions for treatment throughout the state. In particular, upstate New York (222% increase in admissions) and Long Island (242% increase) have been hard hit by this problem. (*NYS Client Data System*)
- In 2011, nonmedical use of prescription drugs among youth ages 12 - 17 and young adults ages 18 - 25 was the second most prevalent illicit drug use category, with marijuana being first. (*NSDUH 2011*)
- Between 2007 and 2012, the number of individuals using heroin during the past 30 days more than doubled nationwide (161,000 to 335,000). (*NSDUH 2012*)
- The percentage of New York State high school students who reported using heroin more than doubled between 2005 and 2011 (1.8 % to 4%). (*Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)*)

## Heroin and Prescription Drug Abuse Can Be Addictive and Deadly

### Loss of tolerance

Regular use of opioids leads to greater tolerance. For example, more is needed to achieve the same effect (high). Overdoses occur when people begin to use again. This is usually following a period of not using (abstinence) such as after coming out of treatment.

### Mixing drugs

Mixing heroin or prescription opioids with other drugs, especially depressants such as benzodiazepines (Xanax, Klonopin, etc.) or alcohol, can lead to an accidental overdose, respiratory problems and death. The effect of mixing drugs is greater than the effect one would expect if taking the drugs separately.

### Variation in strength of heroin

Heroin may vary in strength and effect based on the purity.

### Serious illness

Users with serious illness such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C, heart disease, and endocarditis are at greater risk for overdose.

## Prevent Prescription Drug Misuse

**Despite what some people may assume, abusing prescription drugs is not safe.**

**Safeguard Your Meds** by placing your prescribed medication in a secure location and tracking the number of pills at all times

- Routine tracking of your prescribed medication is smart, especially when others live with you or visit your dorm room/apartment.
- Never share medication that is prescribed for you.
- Never take medication that was prescribed for someone else.
- Don't mix medications. Speak to your health care provider about all medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications.

### Pass It On

Share your knowledge, experience and support with your friends and family.



## Ask for Help

There are many confidential resources available for students – if you ask! Ask your health care professional or seek assistance from a mental health or substance abuse counselor.

## Signs and Symptoms

Change in behavior is key when one suspects there is substance abuse. The key is to get the person assistance as soon as possible.

### Physical Signs

- Loss or increase in appetite; unexplained weight loss or gain
- Small pupils, decreased respiratory rate and a non-responsive state are all signs of opioid intoxication.
- Nausea, vomiting, sweating, shaky hands, feet or head, and large pupils are all signs of opioid withdrawal.

### Behavioral Signs

- Change in attitude/personality
- Change in friends; new hangouts
- Avoiding contact with family
- Change in activities, hobbies or sports
- Drop in grades or work performance
- Isolation and secretive behavior
- Moodiness, irritability, nervousness, giddiness, nodding off
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts or layers of clothing out of season
- Stealing

### Advanced Warning Signs

- Missing medications
- Burnt or missing spoons/ bottle caps
- Missing shoelaces/belts
- Small bags with powder residue
- Syringes

## Good Samaritan Law

Some individuals may fear that police will respond to a 911 call and there will be criminal charges for themselves or for the person who overdosed. Those fears should NEVER keep anyone from calling 911 immediately. It may be a matter of life or death.

In September 2011, the 911 Good Samaritan Law went into effect to address fears about a police response to an overdose. This law provides significant legal protection against criminal charges and prosecution for possession of controlled substances, as well as possession of marijuana and drug paraphernalia. This protection applies to both the person seeking assistance in good faith, as well as to the person who has overdosed. Class A-1 drug felonies, as well as sale or intent to sell controlled substances, are not covered by the law.

The following organizations offer information and resources that can help you and your family.



**1-877-8-HOPENY**

Find Help for **1-877-846-7369**  
Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Problem Gambling



New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services  
[www.oasas.ny.gov](http://www.oasas.ny.gov)



New York State Department of Health  
[www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)



[www.combatheroin.ny.gov](http://www.combatheroin.ny.gov)