



## **Heroin Prevention Task Force Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is Heroin?**

Heroin is a morphine derivative and morphine is opium's most potent active ingredient. First synthesized in 1874, heroin was widely used in medicine in the early part of the 20th century, until its addictive potential was recognized.

Pure heroin is a powder with a bitter taste. Street heroin may vary in color from white to dark brown because of impurities or additives. There is a dark brown or black form of the drug, as dense as roofing tar or coal, known as "black tar."

### **What are the facts about Heroin?**

A tiny, one-dose bag of heroin costs \$5-\$10 and is cheaper than highly controlled synthetic opiates like oxycontin or hydrocodone and is easily accessible to teenagers.

A bag of heroin can be cheaper than a six pack of beer.

Teenagers are snorting it, smoking it, getting hooked faster (today's heroin is upwards of 70% pure as compared to 10% pure a generation ago) and overdosing more.

You can overdose on heroin the very first time you use it.

Children as young as 12 are using heroin.

Heroin arrests have risen 91% in Nassau County between 2005 and 2008.

### **Who uses Heroin?**

There is 'no cookie' cutter heroin user. Individuals of all ages and lifestyles have used heroin. According to the DEA, approximately 1.2% of the population reported using heroin at least once in their lifetime.

### **How is Heroin used?**

Heroin is injected, snorted or smoked. Many new, younger users begin by snorting or smoking heroin because they wish to avoid the social stigma attached to injection drug use. These users often mistakenly believe that snorting or smoking will not lead to addiction.

Users who snort or smoke heroin usually graduate to injection because as their bodies become conditioned to the drug, the effects are less intense, where the effects of injected heroin are more intense.

### **What is the attraction of Heroin?**

Users who inject heroin will feel a euphoric surge or a 'rush' as it is often called. Their mouths may become dry. They may begin to nod in and out and their arms and legs will feel heavy and rubbery. They may experience a diminished mental capacity and dulled emotions. The effect of heroin lasts three to four hours after each dose has been administered.

### **What are the long term consequences of Heroin use?**

Users say they are never able to recreate the euphoria of their first high. Heroin users develop a tolerance for the drug and progressively use more in an effort to get the original feeling. Heroin is highly addictive.

### **Is there a connection between Prescription Drugs and Heroin?**

Abuse of prescription opiate pain killers (i.e., Oxycontin and Vicodin) are behind heroin's growth in popularity with young people: these pills are the doorway to heroin abuse.

Youth become addicted to pain killers initially by helping themselves to their parent's prescriptions (or those of friends' parents). They then need to buy on the 'street', but the pills cost between \$20 - \$50 each. Heroin is much cheaper and easier to get.

Between 2004 and 2008, at least 1,068 people on Long Island died in overdoses of either heroin or prescription opiates.

### **How can I prevent my child from becoming addicted?**

The best way to prevent your child from becoming addicted is to educate yourself about the signs and symptoms of both alcohol and drug abuse and take action as soon as you suspect that your child may be using. Most importantly, develop healthy communication with your child so that you can better recognize any changes that may occur with substance use. Your child will be more likely to seek you out if he or she has a problem if open communication has been established.

A great link for all this information can be found at the Parents Resource Center, sponsored by the Partnership for a Drug Free America at the web site <http://www.drugfree.org> Or MADD Power of Parents web site at <http://www.thepowerofparents.org>.

If you should need some support you can contact a professional. Please refer to the OASAS web site for a listing of certified programs /professionals at <http://www.oasas.state.ny.us> or call OASAS Addiction Services Helpline 1-877-8-HOPE-NY or Nassau County Dept. of Drug and Alcohol 24 hour Hot Line # 516-481-4000.

### **How to know when someone needs help?**

There are signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse, but, it can be difficult to separate from typical teen behavior. You may find tell tale signs from the: Parents Resource Center sponsored by the Partnership for a Drug Free America at the web site <http://www.drugfree.org> or MADD - Power of Parents web site at <http://www.thepowerofparents.org>.

Experts strongly agree that if you suspect something is wrong that you should consult a professional for an assessment. Teaming up with an addiction professional can get your child the help they need. Please refer to the OASAS web site for a listing of certified programs professionals at <http://www.oasas.state.ny.us> or call OASAS Addiction Services Helpline 1-877-8 HOPE NY or Nassau County Dept. of Drug and Alcohol 24 hour Hot Line # 516 481 4000.

### **What kind of treatment services are there?**

Various levels of care and settings are available depending on the individual's needs from outpatient counseling to inpatient and long-term care. An effective treatment program is comprehensive and can provide assistance in other life areas including educational or vocational goals, as well as medical or mental health issues. The type of treatment is dependent upon the stage of addiction. It is best to go to a professional to find out what is the most appropriate service. You may find the resources for a professional assessment by reaching out to the State certified service providers. These providers are listed on the OASAS web site <http://www.oasas.state.ny.us> or call OASAS Addiction Services Helpline 1-877-8 HOPE NY or Nassau County Dept. of Drug and Alcohol 24 hour Hot Line # 516 481 4000. Self help can be found at Intergroup Association of Alcoholics Anonymous <http://www.nyintergroup.org> or Narcotics Anonymous <http://www.nassauna.org/>

**How do I make an intervention happen?**

Be open and ask but be prepared with information and a plan of what to do next. Addiction is a disease of denial so be prepared for that. You can have an informal intervention which is a conversation or a formal intervention with professional and other important family members. You can find a guide to Intervention, "Time to Act" from the Partnership for Drug Free America web site at <http://www.drugfree.org>

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