

## ODS+ENDS, September 2009

### Prescription Drug Abuse

There is ample evidence that non-medical use of prescription drugs is a large problem among young people. In the 2007 Monitoring the Future Study (MTFS), 15.4% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported the non-medical use of at least one prescription medication within the last year. In other words, ***more than 1 in 7 high school seniors are using drugs like Vicodin, Oxycontin, or Aderall to get high.*** In addition, prescription drug abuse among teens has been growing significantly over the past two decades. In the 2008 MTFS, reported past-year, non-medical use of narcotics other than heroin among 12<sup>th</sup> graders grew from 3.5% in 1991 to 9.1% in 2008; while non-medical use of tranquilizers (e.g., Xanax) among 12<sup>th</sup> graders grew from 3.6% in 1991 to 6.2% in 2008.

These trends are problematic because recent research shows that persons who begin using prescription drugs non-medically at an early age are more likely to be diagnosed with lifetime prescription drug abuse and dependence<sup>1</sup>. Between 2004 and 2008, one in 12 patients admitted to Denver metro emergency rooms for abuse or misuse of prescription opioids were 20 years of age and younger<sup>2</sup>.

Rates of teen misuse and abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs are likely rising because:

- ***Prescription and over-the-counter medications are easily accessible:*** Youth can obtain medications by buying pills from their peers with legitimate prescriptions or stealing from household medicine cabinets
- ***Some youth have a lower perceived risk of prescription drug use:*** Since prescription medications do serve a purpose when used and monitored appropriately, teens may not recognize the same risks in abusing prescription drugs as they do in other illicit drugs

Parents and caregivers are instrumental in preventing prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse among youth. As an adult, you can take the following steps to help ensure the youth in your life stay healthy and safe.

- Learn the facts about prescription drug abuse and ways to talk to teens about misusing medications by visiting [Parents. The Anti-Drug.](#) or [Time to Talk](#)
- Monitor your prescription and over-the-counter medications closely to deter youth from raiding medicine cabinets
- Properly dispose of all unused or expired medications; talk to your health care provider or call the [Denver Household Hazardous Waste Program](#) at 720-865-6815 for information and instructions on disposing your old prescription and over-the-counter drugs
- Coming in October: learn more online at [www.RxDrugsNotYoursNotSafe.org](http://www.RxDrugsNotYoursNotSafe.org) from our colleagues at Peer Assistance Services

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<sup>1</sup> McCabe et al "Does Early Onset of Non-Medical Use of Prescription Drugs Predict Subsequent Prescription Drug Abuse and Dependence? Results from a National Study," *Addiction* 102(12): 1920-1930, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network