

BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Student Support Services – Office of Prevention Programs



Over the Counter (OTC) Drug Misuse / Abuse Alert

Recent incidents of over the counter drug misuse / abuse in some of our schools highlight the need for us, as educators, to take a closer look at this growing trend.

There's a new drug of choice among teens these days; and it's as close as the nearest medicine cabinet. School personnel need to be able to identify and help prevent over-the-counter (OTC) drug abuse among teens. As educators, we need to be aware and take steps to help prevent this.

The problem

Teens are abusing over-the-counter drugs, such as cough and cold remedies, in increasing numbers. Some “street terms” for OTC drugs include, poor man's X, dex, robo, tussin, robo trip, SIZ'zurp, triple Cs or CCC (coricidin or any over-the-counter medication containing DXM), purple drank (cough syrup).

OTC drug facts

- Over the counter drugs are readily available and much less expensive than other illicit drugs.
- The majority of teens get these drugs easily and for free, often from friends or relatives.
- About half of teens do not see great risk in abusing these drugs since they believe there is no harm in doing so.
- One third of teens believe there is nothing wrong with using these drugs occasionally for non-medical reasons. ¹
- Research has shown that some teens who wouldn't otherwise use or abuse illicit drugs might abuse over-the-counter drugs. ²
- Many parents aren't even aware they need to talk to their teens about this problem.

Why we should care

Abuse of OTC drugs can be dangerous, even fatal. These are powerful substances that can have unpredictable effects when abused. Teens often take these drugs in combination with alcohol, or illicit drugs, which only add to the dangers and can lead to respiratory ailments, seizures, or heart failure.

OTC drug abuse can limit a teen's potential and ruin promising lives. It interferes with a teen's ability to learn and succeed in school. Those who first abuse drugs before age 16 have a greater risk of substance dependence or abuse later in life.

1. *Partnership for Drug-free America, Partnership Attitude Tracking Study [PATS] 2007*

2. *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2008*

What we can do

No matter what your role is as an educator, it's important to look for opportunities to increase awareness of the problem and relay important prevention messages to students, parents and staff. Sometimes, even a brief conversation can help steer a teen in the right direction.

- Awareness through education is key! Be ready to educate and provide appropriate resources to parents and teens.
- Pay attention to possible signs that might indicate a problem:
 - Changes in friends, appearance, hygiene and behavior.
 - Negative changes in school performance such as missing school or declining grades.
 - Increased secrecy about activities and possessions.
- Be a mentor to teens and families.
- Have students join clubs and activities that promote healthy decisions and healthy behaviors.
- Always listen and be ready to intervene if needed.

For further information, please contact:

- Your school prevention liaison or designee, guidance and family counselors, peer counseling educator, school social worker, School Resource Officers (SRO) or other in-school resource if you recognize or suspect that a student has a problem with OTC or other drugs.
- Substance Abuse Case Managers in each administrative area office.
- The Office of Prevention Programs www.browardprevention.org or by phone at 754-321-2568.
- Christine Sawyer, External Affairs Specialist (Broward Sheriff's Office) 954-557-1124
- Substance Abuse Treatment National Helpline @ 1-800-662-HELP
- Substance abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov