



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Deadly Drugs

Reported Use of Prescription Opioid Pain Medication by Adults — Utah 2008

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Doctors today prescribe a variety of drugs to cure illnesses and help ease the suffering of their patients. Unfortunately, in the U.S., illicit use of prescription pain medicines has resulted in an increased number of both fatal and nonfatal overdoses.

Erin Johnson is a researcher with the Utah Department of Health and she's joining us today by phone to discuss the problem of illicit use of prescription drugs. Welcome to the show, Erin.

[Ms. Johnson] Thanks.

[Dr. Gaynes] Erin, tell us about the problem of people illicitly using prescription drugs in the U.S.?

[Ms. Johnson] Sure. There are a number of ways that you can use medication illicitly. It varies from state to state what the laws are but here in Utah, using someone else's prescription is illegal, as well as sharing your prescription with someone else. So both of those are felonies. So, when we talk about using prescription drugs illicitly, usually we're talking about either using your own medication in higher doses than they were prescribed or for other purposes than what they were prescribed, or using someone else's medication. When we look at how big of a problem this is across the United States, about five percent of the population use their medications for non-medical purposes, or in other words, they're using their own medications for purposes other than prescribed or using somebody else's prescription. So five percent of the population may sound small, but it actually translates into over 15 million people in the United States.

[Dr. Gaynes] What kinds of prescription drugs are most commonly misused?

[Ms. Johnson] Prescription pain relievers are most often misused. These can be Lortab, Percocet, Oxycontin, and those are really the most commonly misused drugs.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is illicit use of prescription drugs more common in any particular age group?

[Ms. Johnson] Most people think of this as a teenage problem, but this is actually a problem that impacts every age group equally. It also impacts males and females equally.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are people illicitly using pain medication for?

[Ms. Johnson] The majority of people who are using other people's pain medication report to be using it to relieve their own pain. Fifteen percent of people report that it's for fun or to get high.

[Dr. Gaynes] Erin, how are people getting prescription pain medicine illegally?

[Ms. Johnson] The vast majority, 97 percent, say that they are getting it from friends or family and the majority of them say that it was given to them freely.

[Dr. Gaynes] What can people do to ensure that their medication doesn't fall into the wrong hands?

[Ms. Johnson] While you're taking your medication, you should keep it locked up. This will prevent accidental ingestion by children, as well as if somebody's looking around for your medication to take it to misuse it. Once you're done with it, dispose of it *immediately*. The way that we recommend doing this is to mix the medication with something undesirable, such as coffee grounds or kitty litter. Mix it up, throw it in a plastic bag, throw it in the garbage, and then have the pill bottle in a separate garbage can and cross out the identifying information. That's the best way to prevent misuse.

[Dr. Gaynes] Erin, where can listeners get more information about the illicit use of prescription medications?

[Ms. Johnson] At www.useonlyasdirected.org.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Erin. I've been talking today with Erin Johnson of the Utah Department of Health about the illicit use of prescription drugs.

Remember, if you've been prescribed pain medicine, don't share it with anyone for any reason. Immediately dispose of extra prescription pain medicine or keep it under lock and key. This will prevent ingestion by children and misuse by others.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.