



OSAM-O-GRAM

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DATELINE: Ohio

Wright State University
The University of Akron



Increase in Adolescents Abusing Over-the-Counter Medications Containing Dextromethorphan (DXM)

In January 2004, increasing abuse of over-the-counter cough medications containing dextromethorphan (DXM) was reported in the Columbus, Dayton, and Youngstown areas. When taken in high doses, DXM acts as dissociative anesthetic like ketamine or PCP (phencyclidine). Many cough medications containing DXM also include other active ingredients such as aspirin, acetaminophen, chlorpheniramine maleate, pseudoephedrine and others, which when abused can cause serious health problems.

Increases in DXM abuse were reported by treatment providers, juvenile probation officers, law enforcement professionals, and some active users in the areas noted. Typical users of DXM were described as suburban high-school age youth. Coricidin® Cough and Cold (sometimes referred to as triple-C), Robitussin®-DM, and some other cough syrups were described as the most commonly sought after DXM-containing products. Reportedly, some users would take up to 16 or more Coricidin® tablets or a couple of bottles of Robitussin® syrup to experience a high. DXM-containing products are perceived as easily available to adolescents who would buy or steal these over-the-counter medications from local pharmacies. A treatment provider working with adolescents in the Columbus area commented:

They start off usually around eight [tablets], which is, ya know, half a box and then they go to a whole box... And they're stealing them, so we're getting more legal referrals because a teenager walking through a line at Kroger with five boxes of Coricidin is gonna be suspicious.

There are numerous sites on the internet that provide information about "recreational" use of DXM (e.g. <http://www.dextromethorphan.ws/>; <http://www.dextroverse.org>), which is especially troubling in view of adolescents' access and engagement with the internet. While some young people may recognize the dangers of abusing these products after visiting these websites, others may use instructions available on the internet to extract DXM from cough medications. There are no controls on internet-provided information and possibility of harm from misinformation is certainly present.

More information on DXM abuse can be found at the Ohio Early Warning Network website (<http://ebasedprevention.org/oewn/alert002.htm>).

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the January 2004 OSAM Network meeting.

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