DXM: Cough Medicine

About one in 25 teens report using cough medicine to get high. Often, these teens are finding information about cough medicine abuse on the Internet.

Class of drug: DXM is a synthetically produced opioid chemically related to codeine, but does not directly stimulate opiate receptors in the brain. It acts as a hallucinogen/dissociative drug at high doses.

Main active ingredient: DXM (dextromethorphan)

What it looks like: It is available in liquid, tablet, capsule, gel cap and lozenge cough preparations. It is also available in powdered form.

Street names: Robo, Dex, Tussin, Skittles, Triple C, Velvet

How it is used: Orally in cough medicines; inhaled in powdered form

Duration of high: The effects can last up to six hours.

Withdrawal symptoms: Restlessness, muscle/bone aches, insomnia, diarrhea, vomiting, cold flashes

Effects:

Recommended doses (.17 - .33 oz of med. containing 15 mg to 30 mg DXM)—cough suppression

DXM abusers describe different “plateau” effects:

Small doses (under 2 oz of med., first plateau)—mimic depressant effects: mild drunkenness

Medium doses (2 oz - 4 oz of med., second plateau) mimic stimulant effects with distorted visual perceptions

Large doses (4 oz - 10 oz or more of med., third and fourth plateaus)—mimic dissociative drugs: distorted perception of sight, time, body and sound, feelings of detachment, hallucinations, violence

Physical—Flushing, sweating, increased body temperature, nausea, seizures, high blood pressure, blurred vision, irregular heartbeat, numbness

Long-term—Liver damage (from medicines also containing acetaminophen) brain damage, coma, death

Many teens are mixing cough medicine with soda and Jolly Ranchers to create a drink called “Lean,” “Sizzurp,” or “Purple Drank.” These drinks are usually made with prescription strength cough medicine containing Codeine or Promethazine. “Lean” has been popularized through hip hop and rap music.

U.S. information

In 2013, 2.9 percent of 8th graders, 4.3 percent of 10th graders and 5 percent of 12th graders reported using cough/cold medicine to get high.

(Monitoring the Future Survey)

Illinois information

As of January 1, 2007, DXM-containing products were banned for sale, delivery, distribution and possession in Illinois except as over-the-counter remedies complying with FDA safety and labeling standards.

(Illinois General Assembly)