



How Common is Cold and Cough Medicine Abuse and Misuse?

- Research shows that over 2 million teens across the country have abused cough medicine to get high (www.drugfree.org).
- In 2009 alone, Poison Centers managed over 4,000 cases involving teenagers 13-19.
- Locally, here in MA and RI, Poison Control managed over 100 cases of cold medicine misuse and abuse in teens (13-19 years old) in 2009.

What are some of the concerns around cold and cough medicine misuse and abuse?

- Large doses of dextromethorphan can cause dangerous increases in heart rate and blood pressure and in very large amounts it could impact someone's breathing.
- Dextromethorphan can also increase the chance of injury as it may cause disorientation, confusion and paranoia. This person may not be as aware of their surroundings, which puts them at increased risk of injury.

At the Poison Center we are concerned about the misuse of cold and cough products due to the other ingredients in many of these products.

There are three main concerns:

- Some cold and flu medications containing dextromethorphan may also contain acetaminophen and when the product is abused, a person may put themselves at risk for liver damage.
- Other products include antihistamines. Excessive amounts of antihistamines can increase heart rate, blood pressure and may cause seizures.
- The third concern would be the potential for serious drug to drug interactions. Some cold and flu medications can cause very serious drug-to-drug interactions when used with certain antidepressants and some ADHD medicines.

What can someone at home do?

- **Be aware of what medications you have in your home and pay attention to the quantity.**
- **Store all OTC and prescription medicine out of the reach and out of sight.**
- **If you suspect someone has overdosed by abusing or misusing cold and cough medications, or if you have any questions about the potential for drug interactions, call the **Poison Center: 1-800-222-1222**.**
- **Trained poison specialists are available 24 hours a day.**