

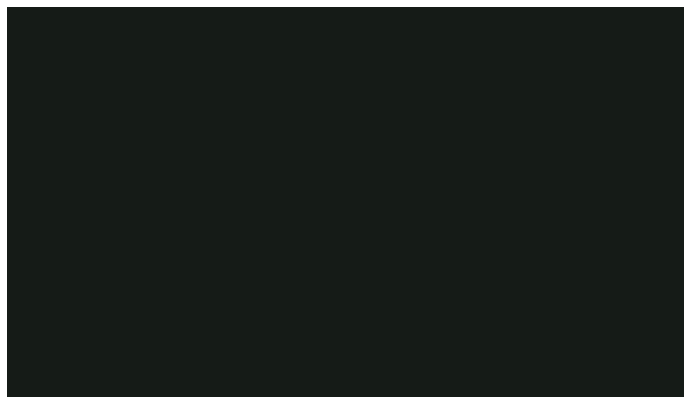
Study: Misusing prescription opioids linked to other risky behaviors

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Teens who have ever misused prescription opioids are more likely to take risks with driving, sex, other substances and more, according to a new study.

As the country grapples with an opioid crisis, researchers have been looking into the impacts of misusing prescription drugs beyond the known health consequences like seizures, heart failure and death.

A team from the University of Colorado School of Medicine performed a more expansive and nationally representative study than those done previously. It analyzed data on nearly 15,000 high school students from the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey and published the results today in "Prescription Opioid Misuse and Risky Adolescent Behavior," (Bhatia D, et al. *Pediatrics*. Jan. 6, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-2470>).

The data showed about 14% of teens had ever misused opioids. Those teens were more likely to engage in all 22 risky behaviors they were asked about in the survey compared to those who had not misused these prescription drugs.

Among driving behaviors, those who had ever misused opioids were nearly six times as likely to have driven under the influence. They also were at least twice as likely to rarely use a seatbelt, have ridden with an intoxicated driver and have texted or emailed while driving.

These teens also were about five times more likely to have had sex with at least four partners. Their odds of having sex before age 13, using substances before sex and not using a condom also increased if they had ever misused prescription opioids.

In addition, the study showed these teens were five to 22 times more likely to try other substances, with the greatest risk seen for heroin. They were almost five times more likely to have ever attempted suicide

The odds of violent behaviors also increased. They were five times more likely to have recently carried a gun and were more likely to have carried other weapons or gotten into a physical fight, according to the study.

Researchers noted their study could not prove causality. It also is not clear whether opioid misuse precedes or follows some of the other risky behaviors. Regardless, they said their findings highlight the need to prevent teens from accessing opioids they should not be taking and to discuss the risks with families.

“When physicians and other providers identify youth misusing prescription opioids, they should have a heightened awareness of associated risky behaviors and potential opportunities for education and prevention,” authors wrote.

Resources

- [AAP policy "Substance Use Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment"](#)
- [DC resources on prescription opioids](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on opioids](#)
- [HealthyChildren.org video on medication safety](#)
- [Pediatrics collection on opioid addiction](#)

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