

Heroin Use Rises Among Teens

More students are taking heroin than in years past at a time when prescription pills abuse is still a growing problem.

By Karen Perry



Is heroin the new drug epidemic facing our young people?

I wish that wasn't the case. But, unfortunately, it appears to be a very serious problem.

With prescription pills abuse still a growing concern for many middle and high school students, the recent rise in heroin use among teens is even more troubling.

According to news accounts, mostly white, middle class and suburban teens from across our nation are now turning to heroin in greater number than in years past. Many are getting hooked after taking prescription painkillers and anti-depressants.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has reported initiations to heroin have increased by a staggering 80 percent among teens ages 12 to 17 since 2002. Even more troubling, many young people are dying from heroin. According to Salon, in 1999, the number of fatal overdoses in young people between 15 and 24 was 198. Ten years later, it had risen to 510.

And get this: as many as 11 percent of teens think it is easy to get heroin, based on the National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

This is all happening because of heroin's low cost and easy availability. In some places, the drug is sold for as low as \$50 dollars a bundle (about one gram) and a "stamp" of heroin can cost as little as \$5 and can be snorted or injected without the hassle of grinding pain relief pills.

So what can parents do to prevent their children from using this terrible drug?

Like other drugs, parents need to play a crucial part in prevention by setting boundaries and expectations, staying involved and engaging in their children's lives, and setting a positive example.

More specifically, it's vital that you talk to your child early on about the dangers of drug abuse. Children are exposed to drug and alcohol topics daily, through TV commercials, advertisements, social media, and the daily news. So countering those negative messages with facts – and compassion – is important.

Also, parents need to learn how to help their children turn down drugs like heroin. For instance, teach your kids:

- That it's OK to say no to their friends.
- To avoid friendships with peers who use drugs.
- To have strong family connections by eating regularly as a family and spending time together on weekends.

Learn more facts and information about keeping your child away from drugs by going on the NOPE Task Force website: www.nopetaskforce.org/for-parents.php

Parents have to get educated about heroin. Its use is more common than many parents would like to believe. Teens today can get this drug from their friends and classmates without too much effort. So be present in your children's lives and watch for warning signs.

Karen Perry is the executive director of NOPE Task Force.