



News Release

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Seven startling facts about prescription painkillers

NSC warns against improper prescription painkiller use during National Poison Prevention Week

Itasca, IL – Our nation’s most abused drug is legal and sitting in the medicine cabinet. Fatal drug overdoses are an epidemic, with opioid prescription painkiller overdoses accounting for the majority of these deaths.

In observance of National Poison Prevention Week (March 16-22), the [National Safety Council](http://www.nsc.org) today released a list of startling facts many people do not – but need to – know about prescription painkiller use:

1. Forty-five people die every day from opioid prescription painkillers – more deaths than heroin and cocaine overdoses combined.
2. In 2010, enough prescription painkillers were provided to medicate every American around the clock for an entire month.
3. More than 70 percent of people who abused prescription pain relievers got the pills from friends or relatives. Only about 5 percent got the painkillers from a drug dealer or from the Internet.
4. The U.S. contains only 4.6 percent of the world’s population but consumes 80 percent of the world’s opioids and 99 percent of the world’s hydrocodone.
5. While middle-aged men and women have the highest prescription painkiller fatal overdose rates, the rates are increasing most rapidly among women. Overdose death rates in women have increased more than 400 percent since 1999, compared to 265 percent among men. Teen use also is rising. One in eight high school seniors admit to using prescription painkillers recreationally.
6. Prescription painkillers are gateway drugs to heroin. In 10 years of treating patients for substance abuse and addiction, NSC Medical Advisor Dr. Don Teater reports having just one patient whose prescription painkiller addiction began with a heroin addiction. All other patients have first been addicted to painkillers and switched to heroin because it is cheaper.
7. Heroin overdose deaths receive significant media attention. But while these deaths increased 45 percent from 2006-2010, prescription painkiller deaths have risen by more than 300 percent since 1999.

“The number of fatal prescription painkiller overdoses is staggering and unacceptable,” said John Ulczycki, vice president of strategic initiatives at NSC. “We need immediate action at the local, state and federal levels. National Poison Prevention Week is the perfect time to begin a dialog about how to address this issue so we can save lives.”

According to the NSC report, [Prescription Nation](http://www.nsc.org), 47 states are failing to adequately address nonmedical prescription painkiller use. NSC examined state efforts in four areas: state leadership and action, Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs, responsible painkiller prescribing and overdose education and prevention programs.

About the National Safety Council

Founded in 1913 and chartered by Congress, the National Safety Council, [nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org), is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to save lives by preventing injuries and deaths at work, in homes and communities, and on the road through leadership, research, education and advocacy. NSC advances this mission by partnering with businesses, government agencies, elected officials and the public in areas where we can make the most impact – distracted driving, teen driving, workplace safety, prescription drug overdoses and Safe Communities.

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