

## RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you think your teen needs professional help, your doctor, hospital, school nurse, or counselor may be able to help. Or you can call 1.800.662.HELP(4357) or visit [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov), the treatment locator hotline and website of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. If you suspect a poisoning, call Poison Help at 1.800.222.1222.

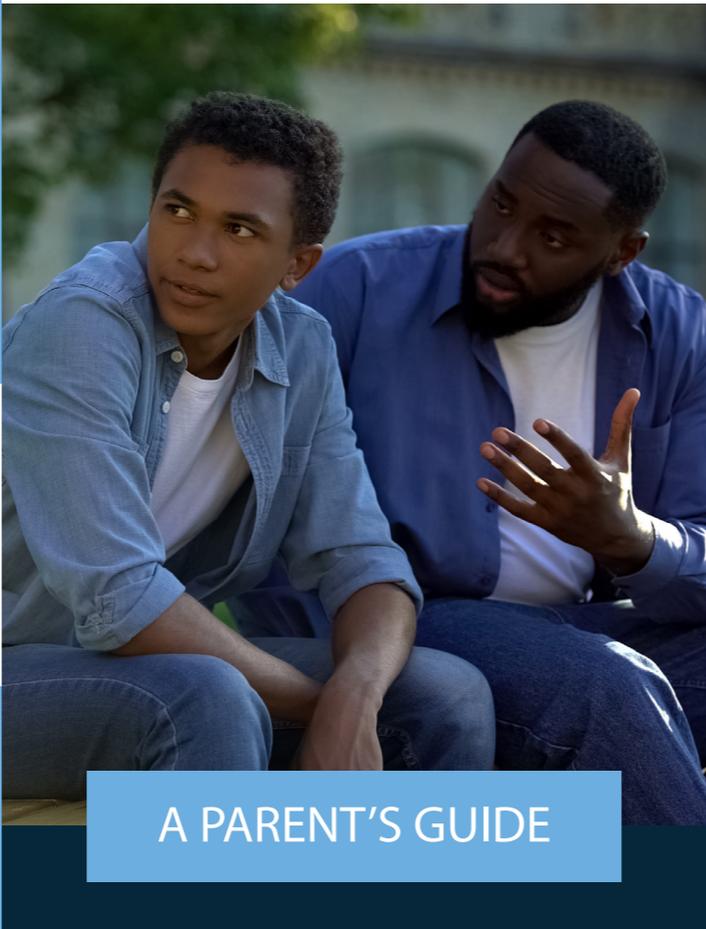
To learn more about medicine abuse and to get help for your family, visit Partnership to End Addiction at [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org) or text CONNECT to 55753 to be connected with a specialist.

## STOPMEDICINEABUSE

Additional copies of this brochure can be ordered free of charge from [StopMedicineAbuse.org](http://StopMedicineAbuse.org).



# PREVENTING TEEN OTC Cough Medicine Abuse



A PARENT'S GUIDE

[STOPMEDICINEABUSE.ORG](http://STOPMEDICINEABUSE.ORG)



## WHAT IS COUGH MEDICINE ABUSE?

Over-the-counter (OTC) cough medicine abuse is taking large doses of cough medicine to get high. The “high” is caused by dextromethorphan, which is often abbreviated DXM, a common active ingredient found in many cough medicines. This sort of abuse — whether it’s called cough medicine abuse or dextromethorphan or DXM abuse — can be dangerous.

### What Are Slang Terms for Dextromethorphan?

The most common terms include:

DXM	Dex/Drex	Robo
Skittles	Syrup	Triple-C
Tussin		

Terms for abusing dextromethorphan include:

Robo-ing	Skittling	Lean
Robo-tripping	Dexing	

▶ **SLANG TERMS** for dextromethorphan vary by product and region. Adults should be familiar with all of them.

### What About Codeine?

OTC cough medicines containing dextromethorphan (DXM) should not be confused with promethazine-codeine cough medicines — also known as **lean** — which is a prescription cough syrup also commonly abused by teens. While the term **lean** technically refers to the abuse of prescription cough medicines containing codeine, teens may use the slang term broadly to refer to the abuse of OTC cough medicines containing DXM.



## SIDE EFFECTS FROM DEXTROMETHORPHAN (DXM) ABUSE CAN INCLUDE:

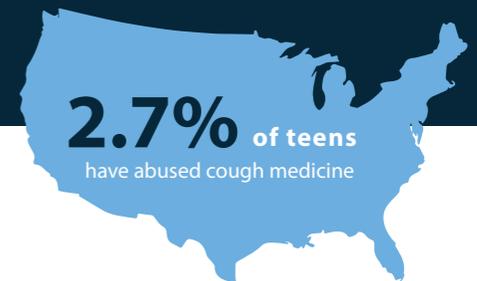
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Confusion
- Dizziness
- Slurred speech
- Rapid heart beat
- High blood pressure
- Physical impairment
- Double or blurred vision
- Drowsiness
- Numbness of fingers & toes
- Disorientation

### Is Dextromethorphan (DXM) Addictive?

DXM, when used as directed, is not an addictive substance. However, repeatedly seeking the “high” caused by abusing DXM can lead to addiction.

### How Common Is Cough Medicine Abuse?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse’s 2021 Monitoring the Future survey, the number of American teens who self-reported they abused OTC cough and cold medicine to get high in the last year **declined from 2020**. Yet there is still work to be done — given that **3.5% of 8th graders reported abusing OTC cough and cold medicine in 2021**, which is down from the 4.6% who reported abuse in 2020 but still much higher than the 1.6% who reported abuse in 2015.



## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO PREVENT COUGH MEDICINE ABUSE

### Educate Yourself

- Educate yourself about cough medicine abuse and share this information with others who are in contact with your teen, such as school administrators, coaches, and counselors.
- Know your state's laws: 21 states prohibit the sale of DXM products to minors (under the age of 18). Find out if your state is one of them by visiting CHPA's page on Preventing Dextromethorphan Abuse at <https://www.chpa.org/about-consumer-healthcare/activities-initiatives/preventing-dextromethorphan-abuse>.

### Talk to Your Teens

- Be clear that you do not want your teen taking medicine without your knowledge.
- Teach your teens and younger children to respect medicines. Medicines are important tools in healthcare, but they must be used according to their directions.
- Make sure your teen understands that abusing cough medicine — just like abusing illegal drugs — can be very dangerous.

### Safeguard Medications

- Know what medicines are in your home and take notice if they go missing.
- If your teen needs medicines during school hours, speak with school officials about medicine policies.



## Where Are Teens Finding Information about How to Abuse Cough Medicine?

Often, these teens learn about abusing cough medicine on the Internet, particularly through the use of social media sites and forums, as well as elements of pop culture such as music. Some of these sources even recommend how much cough medicine to take to get high; suggest other drugs to combine with dextromethorphan (DXM); or, instruct how to extract or “free-base” DXM from cough medicines and promote drug abuse in general. Be aware of what your teen does on the Internet, the websites they visit, and the amount of time they are online.

## Recognize Signs Your Teen Is Using Drugs

Parents don't always recognize their kids might be using drugs.

While it can be hard to know, there are some general warning signs. The fact is, any teen could be using drugs. As a general rule, changes that are sudden or extreme may be a warning sign.

 **SIGNS** your teen could be using drugs include:

- Change in friends
- Change in eating or sleeping patterns
- Changes in physical appearance and hygiene
- Declining grades
- Empty drug or medicine containers or drug paraphernalia
- Loss of interest in hobbies or favorite activities
- Hostile and uncooperative attitude
- Unexplained disappearance of household money
- Unusual chemical or medicinal smells on your teen or in their room

## MORE TIPS FOR RAISING DRUG-FREE TEENS

Monitoring is an effective way you can help your teen stay drug-free, and an important thing to do even if you don't suspect your teen is using drugs. Monitoring means asking your teen questions about where they're going, what they're doing, and with whom they're spending time, as well as keeping tabs on their Internet use by using web browser tools and software designed to block certain sites. If your kids ask you about your monitoring, let them know that it is not because you don't trust them and that you are not trying to catch them in the act. Like any parent, you are simply being good stewards of their well-being and future. Put some of these tips to use, and your teens will benefit.



### Know Where Your Teen Is

It's important to know where your teen is and what they are doing. Research has shown that children without adult supervision are at significantly greater risk of truancy from school, stress, receiving poor grades, risk-taking behavior, and substance abuse.

### Introduce Your Teen to Adult Role Models

Find out what adult-supervised activities — like clubs or after-school sports — interest your teen and help get them involved. Connect with other adults who can help teens avoid the dangers of drugs, and reinforce the benefits of healthy, drug-free living.

### Know Your Teen's Friends

Research by Partnership to End Addiction ([drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org)) shows that teens are more likely to try drugs if they have friends who get high. Parents need to know the friends with whom their children are spending time.



## Helping a Teen Who Is Using Drugs

The goal is to prevent a drug abuse problem in the first place. If you fear, however, that your teen may have a problem, sit down with them for an open discussion. **Voice your suspicions but avoid direct accusations.** Remain calm and rational, ask your teen what has been going on in their life, and discuss ways to avoid using substances in the future. Do not have this conversation when your teen is under the influence.

Be firm and enforce whatever discipline you've laid out in the past for breaking house rules. Remind your teen that this discipline is grounded in care for their health, happiness, and future. Be sure to also discuss ways your teen can regain your lost trust, such as calling in, spending evenings at home, or improving their grades. If you need help with the conversation, ask another family member, your teen's guidance counselor, or a physician.

## What Cough Medicines Contain Dextromethorphan, or DXM?



There are over 100 OTC medicines that contain DXM, either as the only active ingredient or in combination with other active ingredients.

A number of store brand cough medicines contain DXM as well. To know if a product contains DXM, look for “dextromethorphan” in the active ingredient section of the OTC Drug Facts label. Also look for the “PARENTS” label shown above on the packaging of most OTC medicines containing dextromethorphan.