

Many who first misuse prescription pills get them from friends, family: report

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More than 70 percent start that way, government analysis finds.

(HealthDay) -- A new U.S. government analysis shows that more than 70 percent of people who first misuse prescription medications get those pills from their friends or relatives.

"We are in the midst of a public health epidemic driven by prescription drug abuse," Gil Kerlikowske, director of the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, said during a news conference Wednesday.

"Prescription painkiller abuse led to 15,500 [overdose deaths](#) in 2009, which is more than cocaine and [heroin](#) combined."

That year, the tally also exceeded the number of deaths from [motor vehicle accidents](#) for the first time ever, according to the report.

Individuals who frequently abuse [prescription drugs](#) were more likely to obtain them from doctors or over the Internet, the new report also showed.

To arrive at these conclusions, researchers re-analyzed data from the 2009 and 2010 U.S. National Survey on [Drug Use](#) and Health to determine where new and chronic abusers of [prescription pills](#) are getting the drugs. They found that 71 percent of individuals who are just starting to misuse prescription drugs and are not addicted yet get them from their family or friends for free or without asking.

Among chronic abusers of [pain relievers](#), just 41 percent obtained the pills for free or without asking from a friend or relative. Twenty-six percent of chronic prescription drug abusers got the pills from one or more doctors, and 28 percent purchased the medication from a friend or relative, dealer or on the Internet.

The findings highlight the need to properly dispose of unused, unneeded or expired medication, Kerlikowske stressed.

He and other government officials at the news conference urged Americans to participate in "National Take-Back Day," sponsored by the U.S. [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) (DEA) on Saturday, April 28. In more than 5,000 locations throughout the United States, people can turn in unused or expired prescription drugs for safe disposal. Last October, 377,080 pounds of these medications were gathered, and a grand total of 1 million pounds of prescription pills have been collected by the DEA since it started the effort.

"Safety and disposal gaps still exist in our homes, hospital and health care system, and this underscores the importance and urgency of our efforts," said Dr. Margaret Hamburg, commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. She said that the FDA is also working with

industry to develop new formulations of opioid painkillers that are harder to abuse and misuse.

"This is one of greatest drug threats we have ever faced," said DEA administrator Michele Leonhart. "Drugs left in home medicine cabinets are prime candidates for prescription drug abuse. We need to have a proper and safe way to dispose of them."

More information: Learn more about [Take-Back Day](#).

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