

Parents numb to misuse of narcotic pain meds by youth, new poll shows

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Despite data on rising rates of abuse and overdoses of narcotic pain medicines across all age groups, in a new poll from the University of Michigan, most parents said they are not very concerned about misuse of these medicines by children and teens. .

In addition, parent support was lukewarm for policies that would discourage abuse of drugs like [Vicodin](#) or [Oxycontin](#), according to the most recent University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

Overall, 35% of parents said they are very concerned about misuse of narcotic pain medicines by children and teens in their communities; only 1 in 5 parents (19%) are very concerned about misuse of pain medicines in their own families. Black parents (38%) and Hispanic parents (26%) are more likely than white parents (13%) to be very concerned about misuse of narcotic pain medicines in their own families.

The poll also confirmed that prescription pain medicine is common in US [households](#) with children. Thirty-five percent of parents report that, in the last five years, they had received at least one pain medicine prescription for their children; over half of these [prescriptions](#) were for a narcotic pain medicine. Two-thirds (66%) had received at least one pain medicine prescription for themselves or another adult in the household.

National data indicate that the number of [drug overdose deaths](#) attributed to narcotic pain medicines is more than overdose deaths from

heroin and cocaine combined. However, almost half of the parents in this poll do not favor a requirement that they return unused pain medicine to the doctor or pharmacy. Only 41 percent favor a policy that would require a doctor's visit to obtain a refill on narcotic pain medicines.

"Recent estimates are that 1 in 4 [high school seniors](#) have ever used a narcotic pain medicine. However, parents may downplay the risks of narcotic pain medicine because they are prescribed by a doctor," says Sarah J. Clark, M.P.H., Associate Director of the Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit at the University of Michigan and Associate Director of the [National Poll](#) on Children's Health.

"However, people who misuse narcotic pain medicine are often using drugs prescribed to themselves, a friend or a relative. That 'safe' prescription may serve as a readily accessible supply of potentially lethal drugs for children or teens," Clark says.

Although rates of narcotic pain medicine use have been shown to be three times higher among white teens than their black or Hispanic peers, white parents in this poll are less likely than black or Hispanic parents to be very concerned about narcotic pain medicine use, and are less likely to support policies to limit children's access to them.

There was support for some policies to discourage misuse: 66 percent strongly supported requiring parents to show identification when picking narcotic pain medicine for their children. Fifty-seven percent strongly supported policies blocking narcotic pain medicine scripts from more than one doctor.

But overall, the limited level of concern and the lack of strong support for policy changes show the public may not recognize the seriousness of the problem.

"This is a national problem and a growing problem. The results of this poll are a signal that parents may not be aware of the significant rates of misuse of [narcotic pain](#) medicine, which highlights the tremendous challenge of addressing this national problem," Clark says.

More information: Full report: mottnpch.org/reports-surveys/pain-medicines-youth

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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