

Opioid dependency peaks among younger age group

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Maria A. Parker, a doctoral student in Michigan State University's Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, has found that 14- and 15-year-olds are at a higher risk of becoming dependent on prescription drugs within a 12-month period after using them beyond the prescribed amount. Credit: G.L. Kohuth

A Michigan State University study shows that 14- and 15-year-olds are

at a higher risk of becoming dependent on prescription drugs within a 12-month period after using them extra-medically, or beyond the prescribed amount.

The study, led by Maria A. Parker, a doctoral student, along with professor James C. Anthony, both in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, is based on a nationally representative sample of 12- to 21-year-olds taken each year between 2002 and 2013. The survey sample focuses on what happens when young people start to use these drugs for other reasons.

Out of about 42,000 respondents, they found that 14- and 15-year-olds were two to three times more likely to become opioid dependent within a year after first extra-medical use compared to 20- and 21-year-old users. The research also reconfirmed from earlier studies that peak risk for starting to use prescription painkillers above the prescribed intent is seen at 16 and 17 years old.

"Many kids start using these drugs other than what's prescribed because they're curious to see what it feels like," Parker said. "The point of our study was to estimate the risk of dependency after someone in this age group starts using them beyond the boundaries of a doctor's orders."

Their findings come at a time when individual states, including Michigan, are increasing efforts to combat the growing prescription [drug](#) problem.

Earlier this year, Gov. Rick Snyder created a 21-member task force to tackle the issue and offer up new prevention, treatment and regulatory recommendations to curb [prescription drug abuse](#) within the state.

Current statistics show that certain prescribed pain relieving pills such as Vicodin have quadrupled in the last eight years in Michigan and this increase has contributed to the use of other drugs such as heroin.

"It's important to identify when [young people](#) are starting to use these drugs because it allows us to provide prevention or intervention outreach strategies around these ages and much earlier on so things don't escalate into something worse," Parker said.

Knowing where the drugs are coming from and educating parents on the prescribed dosages appropriate for their children, as well as proper places to store drugs, are all ways to help ensure they are using them safely, she added.

Other types of prevention efforts often include peer-resistance programs such as keepin' it REAL and Botvin LifeSkills Training.

"No age group is free from risk though," Parker said.

The study can be found online in the journal *PeerJ*.

Provided by Michigan State University

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