

Some physical sports can lead to heroin use, prescription drug abuse among teens

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High school athletes who play high-contact sports like hockey are at greater risk for heroin use and nonmedical use of prescription opioids, a new University of Michigan study found.

No previous studies have assessed the potential overlapping use of opioids and [heroin](#) among youth athletes, including those involved in different competitive [sports](#), said Philip Veliz, research assistant professor at U-M's Institute for Research on Women and Gender.

The U-M study focuses on high-contact sports such as hockey, football, lacrosse and wrestling where serious sport-related injuries are more likely.

Researchers examined the past-year prevalence of nonmedical use of [prescription opioids](#), heroin use and the concurrent abuse of nonprescription opioids and heroin in a sample of seniors involved in 16 different sports. The data came from more than 21,000 students from the 2006-2014 cohorts of the Monitoring the Future study.

There were no differences found between 12th-graders who participated in at least one competitive sport and nonparticipants with respect to past-year abuse of prescription opioids, heroin use and concurrent use of the drugs.

Most of the 16 sports analyzed were not associated with the three drug use outcomes. However, 12th-graders who participated in hockey had

substantially greater odds of both past-year heroin use and concurrent use of both heroin and nonprescribed drugs.

Veliz said hockey may simply have riskier youth who are involved in the sport, or these athletes have greater access to opioids given that it is predominantly populated by white, middle-class youth.

Overall, 8.3 percent of the respondents indicated nonmedical use of nonprescription opioids and 0.9 percent reported heroin use during the past year. Roughly 0.6 percent of respondents indicated concurrent heroin and abuse of nonprescription opioids the past year.

With respect to past-year involvement in competitive sports, 69.3 percent of seniors participated in at least one competitive sport (30.4 percent, one sport only; 17.7 percent, two sports; 21.2 percent, three or more sports). In particular, the sports with the highest percentage of participants included "other" sports (26 percent), basketball (20.2 percent), football (15.8 percent), baseball (14.5 percent) and soccer (12.9 percent).

Involvement in weightlifting and wrestling were associated with slightly higher odds of past-year nonprescription opioids, while involvement in soccer was modestly associated with lower odds of past-year nonprescription opioids, when compared to respondents who did not participate in these sports during the past-year.

Involvement in both hockey and weightlifting was significantly associated with greater odds of past-year heroin use when compared to respondents who did not participate in these two sports.

"The findings provide critical information to inform doctors and parents of the potential risks associated with participating in certain high contact sports and the need to monitor the use and misuse of prescription drugs

that have high abuse potential," Veliz said.

More information: Philip Veliz et al. Nonmedical Use of Prescription Opioids and Heroin Use Among Adolescents Involved in Competitive Sports, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.021)

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