

Teen Prescription Drug Use

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Psychiatrist Michael Yasinski M.D. discusses the designer drug epidemic.



Prescription pills and “designer drugs” are quickly replacing cocaine, methamphetamines and more classic drugs by modern-day teens. Designer drugs are often perceived as a safer option by teens when, in reality, they can be more lethal than any of the more classic drugs. It is crucial that parents are educated about the latest trend in drug use in order to keep up with their kids who will be undoubtedly exposed to this poison at some point in their lives.

Designer drugs are a combination of chemicals manufactured in underground labs, often outside of the United States. Many of the drugs have been around in some form for the past 30 years but are relatively new to the U.S. There are dozens of specific types, but in general they have symptoms including extreme emotional changes (cycling between extreme euphoria and depression), hallucinations, extreme aggression and downright bizarre behavior like walking the streets naked, sleeping naked in the snow or almost any other crazy scenario you could imagine. Essentially, the drugs seem to access the primal part of our brain and can literally cause wild animal-like behavior.

Ecstasy was one of the first and most popularized designer drugs. In the 1980's, it gained popularity as a “club drug” but more recently other chemicals have been embraced. Over the past few years, Spice, K2 (both marketed as synthetic marijuana) and bath salts (a stimulant which causes severely bizarre behavior similar to a combination of methamphetamine and PCP) have stormed the streets. Shockingly, they were completely legal and easy to find in any smoke/head shop until only this year when the DEA finally banned them after hundreds of documented deaths associated with these drugs.

The latest designer drug to hit the streets is dubbed “Smiles” and has already been implicated in several deaths throughout the U.S. within the past few months. It has been linked to two teen deaths and implicated in the recent bizarre death of Johnny Lewis, the 28-year-old “Sons of Anarchy” actor who allegedly randomly killed an elderly woman before plunging to his death from the top of his roof.

These new drugs present a challenge to parents and the medical community who already struggle with traditional drug addiction. So what can parents do to protect their kids? First, learn from experienced teens who post their firsthand knowledge and experiences of all of the latest drugs on Web sites like www.erowid.org. If you do suspect a change in behavior, a negative drug test is meaningless given the majority of these new drugs do not show up. Parents need to be persistent and realize the medical community has limited knowledge about these drugs which leaves the onus on the parents to stay on top of the latest trends.

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