



United States Department of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
"A Life in the Community For Everyone"

[Skip To Content](#)**SAMHSA**[Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Grants](#) | [Statistics](#) | [Programs](#) | [Newsroom](#) | [Search](#) | [FAQs](#) | [Contact Us](#)**SAMHSA Advisory****SAMHSA News**

Date:
Media Contact:
Telephone:

October 27, 2006
SAMHSA Press
240-276-2130

Federal Report Shows New Nonmedical Users of Prescription Pain Relievers Outnumbered New Marijuana Users Between 2002 and 2004

Misuse of prescription drugs is second only to marijuana as the nation's most prevalent drug problem, and the annual average number of people using pain relievers non-medically for the first time exceeds the number of new marijuana users according to a study released today by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Most young people aged 12 to 17 get these drugs from friends or family members, not the Internet.

The report, *Misuse of Prescription Drugs: Data from the 2002, 2003 and 2004 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health*, covers four broad classes of prescription psychotherapeutics including pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, and sedatives—and the specific drugs OxyContin (a pain reliever) and methamphetamine (a stimulant). Nonmedical use (or misuse) is defined as use of these medications without a prescription or simply for the experience or feeling the drug caused.

The report shows that among specific age groups, young adults aged 18 to 25 tended to have the highest rates of nonmedical use in the past year, followed by youths 12 to 17. Pain relievers, for example, were used nonmedically in the past year by 11.8 percent of young adults compared to 7.5 percent of youths and 3.1 percent of adults aged 26 or older. Among adults aged 18 or older, the risk of dependence or abuse for psychotherapeutics was greater for persons who initiated nonmedical use before age 16 compared with those who initiated use at age 16 or older.

"While marijuana continues to be the most commonly used illicit drug, the misuse of prescription drugs is clearly a growing national concern that requires action from multiple segments of our society," said Assistant Surgeon General Eric Broderick, D.D.S., M.P.H., SAMHSA Acting Deputy Administrator. "We know that 70 to 80 percent of those 12 years or older said they got their drugs from a friend or relative and, very likely, those came from the family medicine cabinet. Only 4.3 percent got the pain relievers from a drug dealer or other stranger and only 0.8 percent reported buying the drug on the Internet. Parents and other caregivers should store their prescription drugs carefully and dispose of any unused drugs before they can fall into the wrong hands."

Based on combined data from the 2002 through 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an annual average of 2.7 million persons aged 12 or older first misused any prescription psychotherapeutic drug in the past year while an annual average of 2.1 million people 12 years or older started using marijuana. An annual average of 11.3 million persons aged 12 or older were using prescription pain relievers nonmedically in the past year compared with an annual average of 25.5 million past-year users of marijuana. This includes new users and users who had started more than 12 months previously.

Although overall patterns for misuse of any prescription psychotherapeutic drug and for specific classes of psychotherapeutics continued to show stable rates, significant increases in the prevalence of lifetime misuse from 2002 through 2004 were observed for some specific types of drugs. Among persons aged 12 or older, nonmedical use of pain relievers in the hydrocodone category (e.g., Vicodin) anytime in the individuals' lives increased from 5.9 percent in 2002 to 7.4 percent in 2004. And use of medications in the oxycodone category (e.g., Percocet or OxyContin) increased from 4.3 percent to 5.0 percent over that period.

Males generally had higher rates than females for misuse of pain relievers, stimulants and methamphetamine among

the overall population aged 12 or older. Among youths aged 12 to 17, however, the rates of nonmedical use in the past year were higher among females than males for any prescription psychotherapeutic drug (9.9 percent for females versus 8.2 percent for males), pain relievers (8.1 percent for females versus 7.0 percent for males), tranquilizers (2.6 percent for females versus 1.9 percent for males), and stimulants (2.6 percent for females versus 1.9 percent for males).

Almost 2 million people aged 12 or older met criteria for past-year dependence or abuse of prescription drugs, including 1.4 million people for pain relievers, 573,000 for tranquilizers, 470,000 for stimulants, and 128,000 for sedatives. Only 12.5 percent of those with a prescription drug use disorder in the past year received specialty treatment for drug problems in that period. Specialty treatment includes treatment at a hospital (inpatient), a rehabilitation facility (inpatient or outpatient), or a mental health center.

Persons aged 12 or older who were living in small metropolitan areas with populations of fewer than 250,000 persons had the highest rates by population density for misuse of any prescription psychotherapeutic drug (7.1 percent), pain relievers (5.4 percent), tranquilizers (2.6 percent), and stimulants (1.7 percent).

Colorado, Kentucky, and Washington State ranked among the states with the highest prevalences of nonmedical prescription pain reliever use among persons aged 12 or older. The District of Columbia and the Midwestern states of Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota were among the states with lower prevalences of pain reliever misuse for persons aged 12 or older.

While the prevalence of methamphetamine use appeared in this report to remain stable from 2002 to 2004, patterns noted in another SAMHSA report on treatment admissions indicated that the number of those seeking treatment for methamphetamine use increased from 44,000 admissions recorded in 1994 to approximately 150,000 in 2004. (A complete copy of that report is located at <http://www.dasis.samhsa.gov/teds04/tedsad2k4web.pdf>)

Misuse of Prescription Drugs: Data from the 2002, 2003 and 2004 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health is based on an annual survey of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population of the United States aged 12 years or older. The *National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)* is sponsored by SAMHSA and is planned and managed by SAMHSA's Office of Applied Studies. *Misuse of Prescription Drugs* is available on the web at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/prescription/toc.htm>

SAMHSA, is a public health agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is responsible for improving the accountability, capacity and effectiveness of the nation's substance abuse prevention, addictions, treatment, and mental health services delivery system.

SAMHSA is An Agency of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Service

[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Staff Directory](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Site Map](#)

[The White House](#) • [Department of Health & Human Services](#) • [FirstGov](#) • [Grants.gov](#)

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration • 1 Choke Cherry Road • Rockville, MD 20857

* **[PDF formatted files require that Adobe Acrobat Reader® program. Click here to download this FREE software now from Adobe.](#)**