

OTC Cough Medicine Abuse Prevention

As of February 2016

For over 50 years, families have relied on cough and cold medicines containing dextromethorphan (DXM) to treat their coughs. Today more than 100 over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold products contain DXM, including Coricidin™, Delsym™, Mucinex DM™, Robitussin™, Tylenol Cough & Cold™, Vicks DayQuil™/NyQuil™. When used correctly, DXM-containing medicines are safe and effective, but when abused in extreme excess, DXM can produce dangerous side effects – especially when combined with alcohol, illicit drugs, or prescription drugs.

Collaborating with established and trusted leaders that specialize in drug abuse prevention and community mobilization, makers of OTC cough and cold medicines containing DXM and their trade group the Consumer Healthcare Products Association (CHPA) have engaged in efforts to curb abuse for over a decade.

PROBLEM: Teens Abuse DXM

While millions of Americans rely on DXM-containing medicines for relief from cough symptoms, some teens are abusing large amounts of cough medicine containing DXM to get high – sometimes taking as much as 25 to 50 times the recommended dose. The National Institute on Drug Abuse 2015 Monitoring the Future Survey, considered the preeminent national study on teen substance abuse, reports that approximately **three percent** of teens abuse OTC cough medicines to get high, down from 5.5% in 2006.

SOLUTION: Address The Drivers That Influence A Teen's Decision To Abuse

1. **ACCESS:** Encourage retailers and legislators to restrict sales to minors
2. **PARENTS:** Mobilize parents to know the risks, talk to peers, talk to teens, and encourage them to monitor and safeguard medicines at home
3. **TEENS:** Emphasize the social disapproval and highlight the risks of abuse

1. Limiting Access to DXM

CHPA supports prohibiting the sale of cough medicine to those under the age of 18 and prohibition of the sale of raw, unfinished dextromethorphan to unregistered entities. Legislation that would have limited sales was introduced in the U.S. House in March 2013 and in the U.S. Senate in January 2014, and more than 130,000 emails were sent to Congress by supporting constituents. CHPA has worked to re-introduce this legislation in the 114th Congress, and supports the congressional designation of a yearly National Medicine Abuse Awareness Month to encourage communities to engage in fighting this type of teen substance abuse.

California became the first state to prohibit the sale of OTC cough medicines containing DXM to minors when the law took effect on January 1, 2012, and since then, Arizona, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington have all passed similar laws.

2. Raising Awareness Among Parents

Kids who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are 50 percent less likely to use drugs. CHPA's StopMedicineAbuse program raises awareness among parents about DXM abuse, its risks, and warning signs. Communications encourage parents to educate themselves, talk to their teens, and safeguard their medicines. Over the years our efforts have ranged from local town halls to national media placements featuring celebrities and five moms who have become dedicated spokespersons on the issue. **Since 2011, this campaign has reached parents more than 1.7 billion times.** In addition to ongoing paid and earned media, specific initiatives include:

- Maintaining **StopMedicineAbuse.org** as the primary information resource on DXM abuse prevention
- **Voluntarily developing and placing an educational icon** that is included on most DXM cough suppressant packages in the U.S.
- Creating an educational toolkit with the **Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America** to engage communities nationwide
- Partnering with **National Association of School Nurses** on the Home to Homeroom campaign, reaching thousands of school nurses nationwide
- Launching the award-winning **Five Moms campaign**, through which five moms have relayed their personal experience and counsel
- Maintaining online parent communities on **Facebook, Twitter and YouTube**



We know our messages are breaking through, as our internal research shows parents have been mobilized to monitor their medicines, talk to their peers, and talk to their teens.

Q. Which, if any, of the following actions have you taken?	2010	2012	2013	2015
Monitored the amount of cough medicine in your household	31%	39%	37%	40%
Took steps to safeguard how OTC cough medicines are stored in my home	30%	38%	33%	44%
Talked to your child about the dangers of cough medicine abuse	42%	46%	47%	45%
Shared information about OTC cough medicine abuse with other adults	13%	24%	20%	23%
Talked to a friend or family member about OTC cough medicine abuse	13%	21%	20%	24%
Q. Which, if any, of the following actions have you taken?				
Have you seen this image? (StopMedicineAbuse.org icon) (% of Yes respondents)	10%	21%	26%	28%

(Source: David Binder Research tracking survey)

3. Detering Teens Looking To Abuse

In May 2012, CHPA joined forces with **The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids** to launch a digital and social media-based prevention initiative targeting those teens actively searching online for information on how to abuse DXM. We are reaching teen "likely triers" where they hang out online with dissuasive, peer-to-peer messaging and imagery. Our goal is to increase teen perception of risk and social disapproval, two proven ways to reduce abuse. We've validated the approach through extensive research and are monitoring and measuring impact.

Our portfolio of creative assets includes YouTube videos, a Facebook app, a mobile app (DXM Labworks), a website (WhatIsDXM.com) that includes answers to many questions teens are asking online, and testimonial videos of real-life former abusers.

Since launching our new teen-targeted campaign in 2012:

- Teens have been exposed to the integrated campaign in the digital space **525 million times**
- Teens have directly engaged with our content online more than **21 million times**
- Teens have visited the website **one million times**
- Our apps have been downloaded almost **300,000 times**



We are changing teen mindsets through these targeted approaches. After being exposed to our content and messaging, teens are much more likely to disapprove of the behavior and have an increased perception of this risk.

	Benchmark (2013)	After forced exposure (2015)	Difference
Q. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements about using non-prescription cough/cold medicine to get high			
Causes nausea and can lead to vomiting	63%	92%	+29
Don't want to be seen as the kind of person who would do this	67%	78%	+11
Will make me look bad in front of friends	54%	72%	+18
Q. Would you say the using non-prescription cough/cold medicine to get high is			
Feel physically sick	38%	62%	+24
Ashamed of	18%	31%	+13
Socially unacceptable	12%	35%	+23
Turns off friends	13%	36%	+23

(Source: Hall & Partners tracking survey)

After limiting access to teens in several states and through voluntary retailer actions, mobilizing parents to monitor their medicines and engage in this conversation, and reaching at-risk teens with our messaging directly, we continue to see the annual prevalence rate decrease (see [Monitoring the Future](#) survey).