

## PRESCRIPTION DRUG MISUSE AMONG MISSOURI COLLEGE STUDENTS

Partners in Prevention (PIP) has been Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium since 2000. The coalition, made up of 21 universities in Missouri, works to promote healthy behaviors on college campuses. In order to gain an understanding of the current health behaviors of college students, PIP implements the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) each year. The information gained from the MCHBS allows PIP to learn more about the high-risk behaviors that students are engaging in, such as prescription drug misuse.

Prescription drug misuse includes taking any legal prescription medication for a purpose other than the reason it was prescribed or in a manner not compliant with the prescribed directions. This includes when a person takes a prescription not prescribed to him or her. This behavior is not as widespread as other substance use among Missouri college students; however it is a

high-risk behavior that requires attention. According to the 2013 MCHBS, 15% of college students reported having misused a prescription drug in the past year. The most common prescription drugs that were reported to have been misused or abused by Missouri college students included stimulants, pain medications, sedatives/anxiety medications, and sleep medications.

### Reported substances used in the past 30 days among those who reported misuse overall

Stimulants	20.9%	Adderall, Ritalin
Pain Medications	23.4%	Vicodin, Codeine
Sedatives/Anxiety Medications	8.6%	Valium, Xanax
Sleep Medications	6.8%	Ambien, Restoril

Prescription drug misuse is not indicative of the behaviors of the majority of Missouri college students. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority reports they believe both their friends (76.7%) and family (89.2%) would disapprove or strongly disapprove of using prescription drug medication without a doctor's prescription.

## DISCUSSION

The most common prescription drugs misused by students are stimulants and pain medications. The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that stimulants are often prescribed to individuals with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to help alleviate symptoms. For individuals diagnosed with ADHD, prescribed stimulants typically have calming and focusing effects on the body; however, individuals who misuse prescription stimulants commonly experience higher body temperatures, feelings of hostility, and irregular heartbeats, with the potential for more severe effects. Pain medication can be prescribed in a number of situations to appropriately manage pain, but when misused, pain medications can cause difficulty breathing, lack of energy, nausea, and can lead to a physical dependence. Family and friend disapproval

of prescription drug misuse could serve as a positive influence on students faced with risky health decisions.

## SUMMARY

The majority of students are making safe decisions when it comes to prescription drugs. However, due to the high-risk nature of such behavior, the small percentage of students misusing prescription drugs should not be overlooked. PIP has begun to address prescription drug misuse with funding from the Missouri Department of Mental Health's Partnership for Success grant. Coalition schools are offered funding and implementation assistance to provide social norming media campaigns and peer education programs on their campus. Additionally, funds are available for campuses to host prescription drug take back events. These strategies were developed to decrease student access to prescription drugs while increasing knowledge of the issues associated with misuse of prescription drugs. The MCHBS will continue to provide insight into prescription drug behaviors, reasons for use, and acceptability of use in future years.

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*Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health*

*National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2013). The science of drug abuse and addiction. Retrieved from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/>*