

Opioid Use by Missouri College Students

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 21 public and private colleges and universities in Missouri. Each year, PIP implements the MACHB (Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors), a statewide survey of college students designed to understand the role of alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), mental health issues, and power-based personal violence on student health and wellness. While alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana are the most abused substances among Missouri college students, campuses are expressing rising concerns about the role that opioids- including heroin and prescription pain medications- play in the lives of Missouri college students.

Extent of the Problem

Opioid use (prescription pain medication and heroin) remains low for college students in Missouri with more students abusing prescription pain medications than using heroin. Prescription misuse is defined by not using your own prescription as prescribed or using a medication without a prescription. As illustrated in the chart below, compared to alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use rates, heroin and prescription drug rates are fairly low.

Substance use in the past year by Missouri college students (MACHB 2017)	
Used alcohol in the past year	76%
Used marijuana in the past year	30%
Used tobacco products in the past year	27%
Misused prescription pain medication in the past year	4.4%
Used heroin in the past year	0.4%

*Misuse is defined by not using your own prescription as prescribed or by using a medication without a prescription.

A Growing Concern

Opioid use in Missouri for the general population is a growing concern. The rate of hospitalizations and emergency department visits due to opioids has increased dramatically in the last decade (137% from 2005 to 2014¹). An executive order signed July 17, 2017 by Missouri Governor Eric Greitens will create a statewide prescription drug monitoring program.

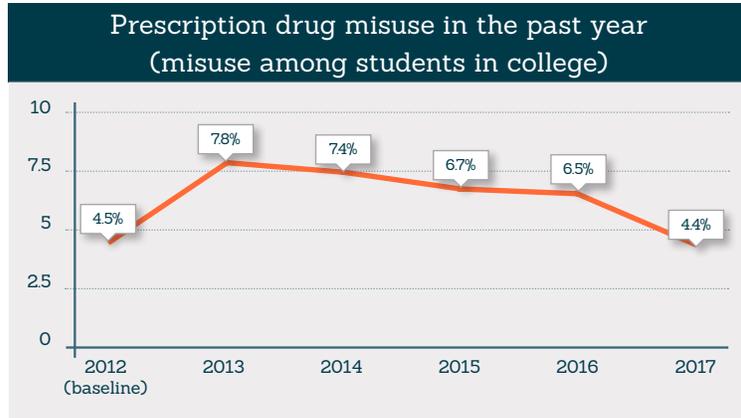
Until this order, Missouri was the only state in the U.S. that did not have such a program. Research now indicates that prescription opioid use may be the precursor to heroin use - nearly half of individuals in 3 recent studies reported using prescription opioids prior to using heroin. Users report switching to heroin because it is cheaper and easier to obtain.²

A Work in Progress

Missouri Partners in Prevention has been educating students about the dangers of prescription pain medications in its MoSafeRx program since 2012 in collaboration with funding from the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health. The MoSafeRx program combines three strategies: educate students on the dangers of prescription drugs, recommend safe alternatives, and provide safe places for students to store or dispose of prescription drugs. The MoSafeRx program has worked with campuses to utilize prescription drug disposal boxes and planned take-back days for opioids and other prescription drugs. In addition, Partners in Prevention has worked with university health centers and pharmacies to understand the consequences of over-prescribing prescription pain medications.

The Mo-HOPE project at the Missouri Institute of Mental Health has provided education to Missouri Partners in Prevention schools and we are working on a partnership to provide naran/naloxone (a prescription medicine that blocks the effects of

opioids and reverses an overdose) to campus first responders such as campus safety, police, and residence halls staff.



Summary

While there is need for concern regarding opioid misuse in Missouri for the general population,

Missouri college campuses have seen decreased rates in the misuse of prescription pain medications, and heroin use may be low relative to equally dangerous prescription opioid use (around 0.5%). It is likely that users of heroin (or heavy users of prescription pain medications) either do not matriculate at our institutions, or do not remain in school very long. However, it remains important to educate students about the risks of misusing prescription pain medications, provide resources for safe disposal of medications, and provide help for students who may be experiencing addiction or physical dependence.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.
Report compiled 7/14/17 by Joan Masters, Project Director and Margo Leitschuh, Communications Coordinator.

¹Porth, L. (2015, November). Opioid use in Missouri: Strategy for reduced misuse and abuse. Missouri Hospital Association. <http://www.mhanet.com/mhaimages/opioid/MHABoardRecs.pdf>

²National Institute on Drug Abuse. Heroin - How is heroin linked to prescription drug abuse? 2014, November.