



PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE: A GROWING HEALTH CRISIS

Across the nation and throughout New York State, prescription drug abuse has reached crisis proportions – destroying young lives, harming local communities, and creating a tremendous new burden for law enforcement.

KEY FACTS:

- Prescription painkillers are responsible for roughly **15,000 deaths and 475,000 emergency room visits** a year, killing more people than car accidents, according to a new report by the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- **In 2010, over 22 million prescriptions for painkilling drugs were written in New York State -- not including refills. That's a stunning figure, especially in a state where the entire population is less than 19.5 million.**
- According to the NYS Attorney General, prescriptions for hydrocodone have increased 16.7% since 2007, while those for oxycodone have skyrocketed by a remarkable 82%.
- In a survey by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, **19% of U.S. teenagers – roughly 4.5 million youths – reported having taken prescription painkillers such as Vicodin, OxyContin and other drugs to get high.**
- In fact, authorities have reported a disturbing trend of "**Skittles Parties**" where young teens toss a variety of prescription drugs (often taken from a parent's medicine cabinet) into bowls or other containers for partygoers to randomly grab and ingest.
- According to the CDC, the dramatic rise in overdose deaths in the U.S. parallels a 300% increase since 1999 in the sale of these painkillers. **These drugs were involved in 14,800 overdose deaths in 2008, more than cocaine and heroin combined.**
- Law enforcement agencies across the country have reported that these pharmaceuticals are the most problematic drug threat today, leading to addiction, overdoses, suicides, violence and illegal trafficking. According to various reports, **there were 30 armed robberies of pharmacies in 2010—up from 4 in 2006.**
- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, prescription and over-the-counter drugs are, after marijuana (and alcohol), the most commonly abused substances by Americans 14 and older. More than half were females and 1/3 were aged 12 to 17.
- A recent study by the Federal Drug Abuse Warning Network concluded that abuse of the opiates methadone, Oxycodone and Hydrocodone combined for **more than 110,000 New York ER visits.**
- According to a recent General Accounting Office audit, prescription drug abuse is also costing taxpayers millions of dollars in Medicaid fraud each year through a practice known as "doctor-shopping" that allows purchasers to exceed the legal limit of drugs. These drugs can later be sold on the streets for a huge profit.



LANDMARK NEW LAW TO COMBAT PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Bill Highlights:

Working in a bi-partisan way with Governor Cuomo, the Senate Republican Majority has forged a landmark agreement on a comprehensive prescription drug reform law that will make New York a national leader in curbing prescription drug abuse. Key elements include:

Creating a New and Updated Prescription Monitoring Program (I-STOP)

- This new system will provide better care and be effective in combating “doctor-shopping” and illegal drug trafficking.

Mandating Electronic Prescribing of Controlled Substances

- New York will become a national leader by being one of the first states to move from paper prescriptions to a system mandating the electronic prescribing (e-prescribing) for all controlled substances with limited exceptions.
- Electronic prescribing enhances patient care by minimizing medication errors due to misinterpretations of handwriting on written prescriptions.
- Additionally, e-prescribing is also more convenient for consumers, who would otherwise need to either wait at the pharmacy for a prescription to be filled, or make separate trips to drop off the prescription form and then pick up the medication.

Improving Education and Awareness of Prescribers to Stem Abuse

- This legislation establishes a Department of Health workgroup that will be responsible for making recommendations on: (1) continuing education for practitioners and pharmacists on pain management issues; (2) protecting and promoting access by patients with a legitimate need for controlled substances; (3) the implementation of the I-STOP provisions; and (4) inclusion of additional controlled substances in the consultation requirements of I-STOP.

Creating a Safe Disposal Program to Safely Dispose of Prescription Drugs

- This legislation requires DOH to institute a program for the safe disposal of unused controlled substances by consumers. Through the program, DOH will work with local police departments to establish secure disposal sites for controlled substances on the premises of police stations. At these sites individuals can voluntarily surrender unwanted and unused controlled substances. Current federal regulations prohibit patients from returning unused controlled substances to pharmacists and doctors.

Updating Controlled Substance Schedules to Stop Abuse

- The legislation combats prescription drug abuse by removing hydrocodone from Schedule III and placing it on Schedule II regardless of formulation. This will control hydrocodone abuse by eliminating automatic refills and, in general, by limiting the amount prescribed to a 30-day supply in most cases.