



Adolescents who use a legitimately prescribed opioid pain medication before finishing high school are 33% more likely to nonmedically misuse opioids during the college-age years of 19-23 (see article below). Nonmedical misuse of prescription opioid pain pills is a frequent gateway to opioid addiction that is nondiscriminatory: It can happen to anyone in any family. Be aware and be careful with legitimately prescribed opioid pain pills.

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# Prescription Opioids in Adolescence and Future Opioid Misuse

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## Abstract

**BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE:** Legitimate opioid use is associated with an increased risk of long-term opioid use and possibly misuse in adults. The objective of this study was to estimate the risk of future opioid misuse among adolescents who have not yet graduated from high school.

**METHODS:** Prospective, panel data come from the Monitoring the Future study. The analysis uses a nationally representative sample of 6220 individuals surveyed in school in 12th grade and then followed up through age 23. Analyses are stratified by predicted future opioid misuse as measured in 12th grade on the basis of known risk factors. The main outcome is nonmedical use of a prescription opioid at ages 19 to 23. Predictors include use of a legitimate prescription by 12th grade, as well as baseline history of drug use and baseline attitudes toward illegal drug use.

**RESULTS:** Legitimate opioid use before high school graduation is independently associated with a 33% increase in the risk of future opioid misuse after high school. This association is concentrated among individuals who have little to no history of drug use and, as well, strong disapproval of illegal drug use at baseline.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Use of prescribed opioids before the 12th grade is independently associated with future opioid misuse among patients with little drug experience and who disapprove of illegal drug use. Clinic-based education and prevention efforts have substantial potential to reduce future opioid misuse among these individuals, who begin opioid use with strong attitudes against illegal drug use.

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