USC Study Reveals Teens Who Abuse Opioids More Likely to Use Heroin Later On

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A USC study published in JAMA Pediatrics has revealed that teenagers who use prescription opioids for recreational purposes are more likely to start using heroin by high school graduation.

This association reinforces the fact that adolescents need to be considered in the discussion of the opioid epidemic. This is yet another unforeseen side effect of the present opioid crisis, which is now being considered the worst drug crisis in US history.

?Prescription opioids and heroin activate the brain?s pleasure circuit in similar ways,? said Adam Leventhal, senior author of the study. Leventhal, who is also the director of the USC Institute for Addiction Science at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, believes that recreational use of prescription opioids can be a gateway to more serious drug habits.

Leventhal said that the study is the first to track prescription opioid and heroin use in a group of teens over time. The study was conducted from 2013 to 2017. In 2017, 9 percent of the nation?s 47, 600 opioid overdose deaths occurred in people under the age of 25, according to data from the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention.

Aside from overdose, the health risks associated with heroin use include HIV, hepatitis C, infections, and severe addiction. This means adolescent heroin users are at great risk of these devastating illnesses.

The study used surveys conducted twice per year in order to track the use of various drugs among high school students. Researchers followed 3,298 freshmen from 10 Los Angeles-area high schools through their senior year. Participants were asked about their previous and current use of prescription painkillers such as Oxycontin, Vicodin, and Percocet.

The researchers also asked the students if they used heroin or other substances like marijuana, alcohol, cigarettes, methamphetamine, and inhalants. They used statistical adjustments to account for differences in the family environment and drug history, psychological disposition, and other relevant factors associated with non-medical prescription opioid use.

Of the nearly 3,300 students in the study, 596 reported using prescription opioids to get high during the first 3.5 years of high school. The researchers found that prescription painkiller use made a big difference in who later used heroin. For current prescription opioid users, 13.1 percent later used heroin. Meanwhile, 10.7 percent of previous prescription opioid users went on to use heroin by the end of high school.

Only 1.7 percent of the students who did not use prescription opioids to get high had later tried heroin by the end of high school. Click the link to see Stockton's top rehab placement programs.

?Adolescents are sometimes overlooked in the opioid epidemic discussion,? said first author Lorraine Kelley-Quon, a pediatric surgeon and assistant professor of surgery and preventive medicine at Children?s Hospital Los Angeles and the Keck School of Medicine. ?The association between frequent nonmedical opioid use and later heroin use in youth is concerning and warrants further research and health policy interventions.?

To confirm their results, the researchers also evaluated the connection between heroin use and other drugs like marijuana and methamphetamine. The association between opioids and heroin use was stronger than the associations for heroin use with other substances.

?While we can?t definitively conclude that there is a cause-and-effect relation, there may be something unique about opioid drugs that makes youths vulnerable to trying heroin,? Leventhal said. ?The results do not appear to be driven by the tendency of some teens to act out, rebel or experiment with many types of drugs.?

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A

combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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