

# **CPYU Trend Alert: A Syrupy New Drug Problem** by Walt Mueller

They are parents who've experienced a nightmare no dad or mom ever wants to face. Upon returning home from church, they found their 17-year-old son and his 19-year-old friend dead. The newspaper reports all mentioned that "significant quantities" of dextromethorphan (DXM) had been found at the scene. Toxicology tests later confirmed that the two teenage boys had died as a result of overdosing on over-the-counter cough syrup.

Cough syrup?!? Yes, that's right. As if there aren't already too many illicit drugs out there that are being abused by teens, now we hear that a growing number of kids are abusing any of well over a hundred different cough syrups that contain DXM in an effort to experience a cheap and easy high.

Dextromethorphan is a synthetic cough suppressant that was originally approved for use by the FDA back in 1954. When a growing number of teenagers began abusing codeine-laced cough medications back in the 1970's, the FDA required the removal of the narcotic codeine from non-prescription cough medicine, replacing it with DXM. Today, DXM is being abused and it's the main ingredient in cough medications with "DM," "Tuss," "Cough," or "Cough Suppressant" on the label.

Once teens learned how to abuse DXM as an avenue to get high, word quickly spread from peer to peer. Kids began looking for DXM in the family medicine cabinet or at the neighborhood pharmacy. A growing number of pharmacies have reported frequent instances of shoplifting and break-ins perpetrated by kids on a hunt for this new cough syrup high. More and more kids are using the internet to not only purchase DXM in its pure powdered form, but to learn how to abuse it. Some sites even offer dosage charts explaining how much DMX is needed to get high depending on one's weight.

If you're keeping your parental ear to the ground in an effort to keep substance abuse and drug addiction from rearing their ugly heads in your home, it's important to know how kids are abusing DXM. The ingredient is found in cough medications that come in a variety of forms including syrups, pills, tablets, gel caps, and lozenges. On the street, DXM is referred to as Candy, Triple C, Dex, C-C-C, DM, Drex, Red Devils, Rojo, Robo, Skittles, Velvet, Vitamin D, and Tussin. Heavy users refer to themselves as "syrup heads," and they describe using with terms like dexing, robotripping, skittling, robodosing, and tussing. If your kids are using any of these terms, there's a good chance they're abusing DXM.

A normal healthy and harmless dosage of DXM is between 15 and 30 milligrams, just enough to suppress a nasty and nagging cough. Kids have learned that they can chug or ingest high quantities of DXM in order to experience effects similar to the drug PCP. These effects can be felt in doses as low as 100 milligrams. However, the average dose kids are using is 360 milligrams or more. The high can last for as long as six hours and the effects increase when used in combination with other drugs like marijuana, alcohol, or ecstasy.

It's important for parents to be aware of new drug trends so that they can exercise a preventive influence by warning their kids about the dangers of substance abuse. You should also know the signs and dangers of DXM abuse. Users will experience any number of signs and symptoms, including loss of motor control, hallucinations, confusion, impaired judgment, profuse sweating, numbness in fingers and toes, red face, paranoia, vomiting, dry skin seizures, and lethargy.

Many of our kids will try DXM because they are curious or looking to engage in harmless fun. Others will abuse the drug in an effort to temporarily escape from the pressures of life. All of them need to know that this is anything but harmless fun. This is a drug that can cause cerebral hemorrhage, stroke, permanent brain damage, and even death.

What steps can you take to steer your teen away from this dangerous new drug trend?

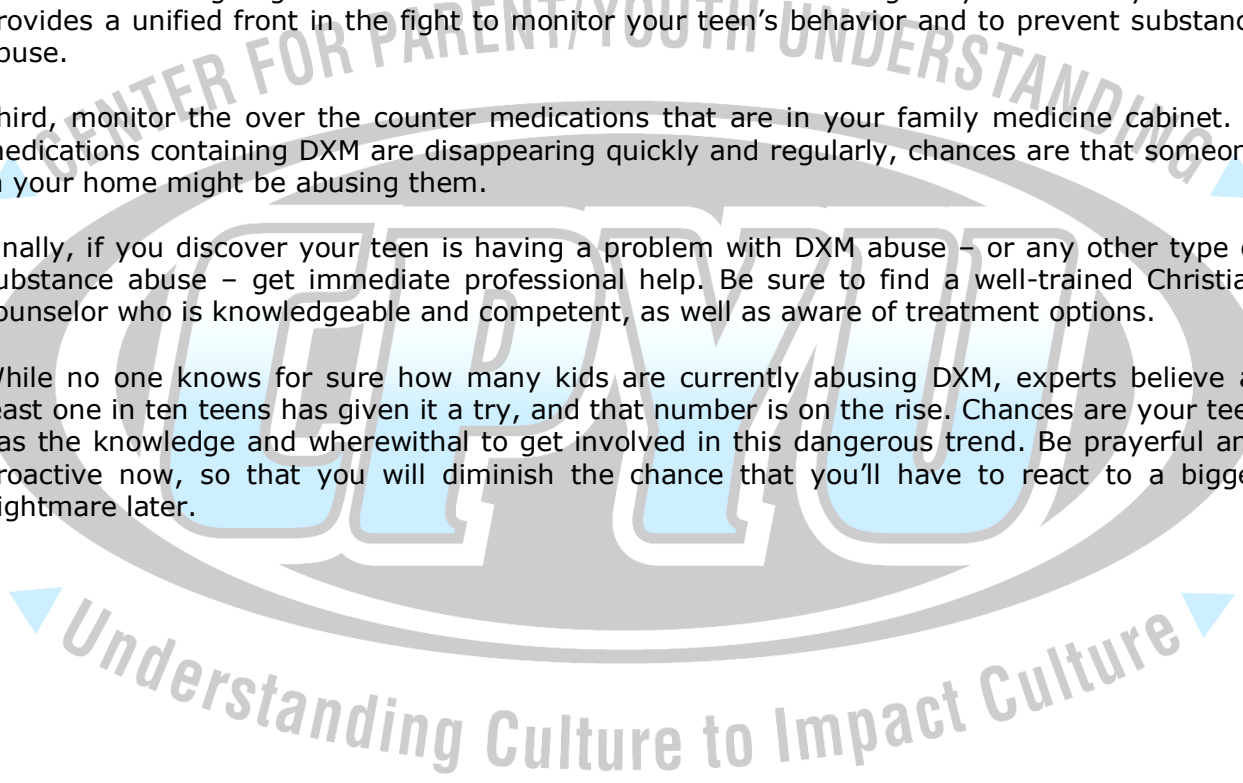
First, warn your teen about the very real dangers – both physical and spiritual – that exist. Substance abuse is morally and ethically wrong. Encourage your kids to live a life that's pleasing to God. If they are experiencing problems that lead them to look for ways to escape from the pressures of life, work with them to get them the help they need so that they might solve their problems with God-honoring solutions.

Second, know the signs of cough medicine abuse and tell other parents about this growing problem. Working together with other adults who know and regularly relate to your teen provides a unified front in the fight to monitor your teen's behavior and to prevent substance abuse.

Third, monitor the over the counter medications that are in your family medicine cabinet. If medications containing DXM are disappearing quickly and regularly, chances are that someone in your home might be abusing them.

Finally, if you discover your teen is having a problem with DXM abuse – or any other type of substance abuse – get immediate professional help. Be sure to find a well-trained Christian counselor who is knowledgeable and competent, as well as aware of treatment options.

While no one knows for sure how many kids are currently abusing DXM, experts believe at least one in ten teens has given it a try, and that number is on the rise. Chances are your teen has the knowledge and wherewithal to get involved in this dangerous trend. Be prayerful and proactive now, so that you will diminish the chance that you'll have to react to a bigger nightmare later.



**For more information on today's youth culture, visit the website of the  
Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at  
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