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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF JULY 08, 2015

What kinds of prescriptions medications are most addictive?

Opioids, depressants, and stimulants are the three most commonly abused prescription drug types, according to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Health officials say they are most concerned currently with opioids — or narcotic painkillers including Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, and codeine — which have become increasingly popular among young adults, who can buy them from dealers or steal them from medicine cabinets.

Researchers say that those who take prescription opioids are most at risk of abusing heroin, which is a type of opioid.

The state health department has compiled a [list of commonly misused drugs](#), showing their slang names, what form the drugs can come in, and how people use the drugs. Health officials have also [outlined risk factors](#) for opioid abuse.

What should I do if I am prescribed an opioid for a legitimate reason, or if a family member is?

Certain people are more at risk for addiction than others, so the

answer can vary significantly from one person to the next, said

Dr. Sarah Wakeman, medical director of the substance abuse center at Massachusetts General Hospital. But she outlined several points to consider if you find yourself in such a situation.



Opioid task force says more beds, treatment options needed

The group was commissioned with tackling the crisis, which claimed more than 1,000 lives in Mass. in 2014, by the governor.

Heroin use spikes among women, higher-income groups

“For all people, regardless of risk factors, it is important to remember that opioids are meant for severe pain that is not controlled with other treatment options,” said Wakeman, who also served as a member of the governor’s opioid working group.

“So I would encourage people to first try anti-inflammatories like ibuprofen, Tylenol, ice, and rest to see if they can get some pain relief with those interventions,” she added. “If they are still in severe pain, that is when they could consider an opioid.”

She also stressed that the goal for people who are bothered by pain should not be to get themselves to a point where they are completely pain-free, but rather to make their pain manageable.

If prescribed an opioid, you should consider whether you or someone in your family has a history of addiction, and if so, you should “weigh the risk and benefit of the medication,” Wakeman said.

Officials at the state health department stressed that prescribed opioids and other medications should “be taken exactly as directed by your health care provider.”

“Do not share your medication with anyone, even if their symptoms are the same,” state health officials said.

What should be done with any leftover medications?

State health officials have compiled a [list of tips on how to prevent prescription drug abuse](#), including by keeping medications secure and disposing of them properly.

Prescription medications should not be flushed down a drain, unless instructions that come with the drugs specifically say to do so.

And health officials say that the drugs should not just simply be tossed in the trash. Instead, the medicine should be crushed and mixed with coffee grounds or kitty litter, and then placed in an unmarked container, such as an empty can or sealable bag, and then thrown in the trash.

Unused medications can be dropped off at secure boxes around the state. A list of prescription drug drop box locations in Massachusetts can be found [here](#).

The US Food and Drug Administration also has a [how-to guide](#) for disposing of unused medicine.

What are the signs of abuse?

Signs can vary, but state health officials say there are certain things to look out for.

One of the most obvious signs would be if you noticed a person taking more medication than they have been prescribed or if medications have gone missing, health officials say.

Prescription drug abusers can also display physical symptoms, including fatigue, confusion, weight loss, slurred speech, and dizziness. They may seem unconcerned about their appearance and could display dramatic mood fluctuations as well as changes in their eating and sleeping habits.

Other signs can include hanging out with different friends, struggling in school or at work, and abrupt changes in finances, according to health officials.

The state health department also lists [more than a dozen objects](#) that may be clues of drug abuse, including finding rolled paper money, a bent spoon, a syringe, an empty pill bottle, or a belt with teeth marks.

For a list of overdose symptoms, [click here](#). Health officials stress that you should call 911 if you believe someone has overdosed.

Where can I find resources if I'm worried about someone?

Substance abuse treatment center locations and contact information can be found online [here](#).

The [Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline](#) offers free, confidential assistance to find services, coordinate insurance, and makes referrals to publicly funded programs. The help line's number is: 1-800-327-5050 or TTY 617-536-5872.

The state health department has compiled a list of other treatment and support resources [here](#), and in partnership with the Learn 2 Cope support organization, state health officials have developed a [guide for parents](#) who want to talk to their child about getting help.

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