



FACTS ON DEXTROMETHORPHAN (DXM)

Dextromethorphan (DXM) is the active ingredient found in many over-the-counter cough and cold medications. When someone takes the recommended amount, these medications are safe and effective. But taking high doses can be dangerous, and other active ingredients also found in these medications can add to the risks.

How is DXM abused?

DXM is taken orally, usually as a liquid syrup or pill. Some people have begun to use a powder form of the drug. People who abuse it in excessive amounts sometimes refer to DXM as robo-tripping, skittling, dex, or candy.

What are the consequences associated with DXM abuse?

In very large quantities, DXM can cause effects similar to that of ketamine or PCP, because DXM affects similar sites in the brain. These drugs are called “dissociative,” which means they create feelings of not being oneself or of being separate or detached from the environment; they distort perceptions and emotions.

Other effects of DXM abuse can include impaired motor function, numbness, nausea and vomiting, and increased heart rate and blood pressure. On rare occasions, hypoxic brain damage occurs. That means little or no oxygen can get to the brain because of the side effects of the combination of DXM and decongestants also often found in these medications.

What can I do?

When someone has a drug problem, it's not always easy to know what to do. If someone you know is abusing or misusing prescription drugs, encourage him or her to talk to a parent, school guidance counselor, or other trusted adult. There are also anonymous resources, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline **(1-800-273-TALK)** and the Treatment Referral Helpline **(1-800-662-HELP)**.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline **(1-800-273-TALK)** is a crisis hotline that can help with a lot of issues, not just suicide. For example, anyone who feels sad, hopeless, or suicidal; family and friends who are concerned about a loved one; or anyone interested in mental health treatment referrals can call this Lifeline. Callers are connected with a professional nearby who will talk with them about what they're feeling or about concerns for family and friends.

In addition, the Treatment Referral Helpline **(1-800-662-HELP)**—offered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment—refers callers to treatment facilities, support groups, and other local organizations that can provide help for their specific needs. You can also locate treatment centers in your state by going to **www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov**.

“Facts on Dextromethorphan (DXM)” is part of a series of fact sheets from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) that are designed to inform students, parents, educators, and mentors about the harmful effects of prescription drug abuse. To learn more about how you can get involved in spreading the word about the dangers of prescription drug abuse, visit **<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/PEERx>**.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

NIDA NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE

PEERx: Rx ABUSE IS DRUG ABUSE

This material may be used or reproduced without permission from NIDA. Citation of the source is appreciated. October 2009