New and Emerging Drug Trends

New drugs and drug use trends often burst on the scene rapidly. The emerging trends and patterns of drug use among teens are constantly changing. Here are some of the new drugs and drug use trends we are learning about as we work with teens in the community.

**Fentanyl**

Fentanyl is a synthetic opiate analgesic. It is typically prescribed to individuals suffering from severe pain and to manage pain after surgery. Although fentanyl is not a new drug, there have been hundreds of fentanyl overdoses since 2013. Fentanyl is 30 to 50 times more potent than heroin. Fentanyl is meant to only be used when prescribed by a physician. Unfortunately, teens are able to obtain the drug through a variety of illicit channels. Fentanyl is often administered as an injection, transdermal patch, or in lozenge form. Teens that use and abuse fentanyl are at risk for serious health complications. Some of the side effects are:

- Euphoria
- Drowsiness/respiratory depression and arrest
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Constipation
- Sedation
- Unconsciousness
- Coma
- Tolerance
- Addiction

**Over-the-Counter Medications**
One of the most common ways teens are getting high is by abusing legal substances and over the counter drugs. While very dangerous, teens often feel that using these types of substances is safer than illicit drugs and alcohol. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Two of the most commonly abused over-the-counter medications are allergy medications and cough medicine.

**Allergy Medication**: antihistamines are commonly abused for the sedative effects experienced. The sedation experienced is intensified when mixed with other medications such as Xanax or Valium. The most commonly abused is Benadry, taken in large doses. Along with the high it produces, the dosages taken in order to achieve an effect are very dangerous. We have recently seen individuals entering treatment following Benadryl overdose. With repeated abuse, a user may experience seizures, glaucoma and cardiovascular disease. The most common side effects are:

- Heavy sedation
- Confusion
- Elevated heart rate
- Nausea
- Double vision
- Dry mouth
- Loss of appetite.

**Cough Medicine**: over-the-counter cough medications commonly contain the ingredient dextromethorphan (DXM). Cough medicine is one of the most commonly abused household items. While most drug stores require proof of identification, it remains relatively accessible. When abused, this ingredient can cause euphoria and induce hallucinations. In high enough doses, there is a possibility of death. Robitussin and Nyquil are the two most commonly abused over-the-counter cough medications. The high can last 6 hours. When DXM products are taken in high doses repeatedly, a mental condition called chemical psychosis can occur and may require hospitalization. Some negative side effects are:

- Sweating
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Anxiety
- Paranoia
- Decreased motor skills
- Elevated blood pressure
- Sedation.

**Caffeine Powder**

The FDA has recently issued a safety advisory about caffeine powders after a high school student in Ohio died as a result of a caffeine powder overdose. Teens are easily able to obtain the drug, caffeine powder is readily available legally online and in bulk. Adolescents and teens report finding the drug attractive when looking for added caffeine stimulation, to increase academic and athletic performance, to allow them to consume more alcohol and for help losing weight. A teaspoon of pure caffeine power is equivalent to approximately 25 cups of coffee; this is considered a lethal amount of caffeine. Here are some of the side effects and possible symptoms of caffeine powder abuse:

- Fast and erratic heartbeat
- Increased energy
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Disorientation
- Seizures

**Synthetic Cannabinoids:** Spice, K2, Etc.

The high prevalence of teens and young adults using and experimenting with synthetic
cannabinoids is a serious issue. We have previously discussed these drugs, but their continued prevalence and high toxicity warrants a second mention. There have been a surge of hospitalizations and poison control calls linked to the consumption of synthetic cannabinoid drugs.

**Salvia**

Salvia is a natural herb used to achieve hallucinogenic effects. Due to the lack of legal restrictions, easy accessibility, and unknown long-term side effects, Salvia poses serious health risks for users. Similar to any other hallucinogenic drug, Salvia produces effects that cause the user to be unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. This can lead to dangerous decision-making and actions taken. Along with the serious immediate health risks associated with Salvia, the unknown long-term effects of Salvia use make this a dangerous experimental drug.

There are several routes of administration for Salvia use and various side effects associated with the drug. Salvia can be ingested orally by chewing the fresh leaves of the Salvia plant or by drinking the juice extracted from the leaves. Salvia can also be smoked, inhaled or vaporized. Some possible side effects and symptoms of Salvia use are:

- Uncontrollable laughter
- Dizziness
- Chills
- Loss of coordination
- Slurred speech
- Decreased heart rate
- Changes in vision
- Feelings of detachment
- Paranoia
- Hallucinations
- Thrashing of body similar to that of a seizure

**Flakka (alpha-PVP)**

Flakka, is a new and extremely dangerous drug that has been discussed recently in the news and has been linked to numerous deaths in the U.S. Flakka is a synthetic cathinone drug and is chemically similar to other synthetic cathinone drugs popularly called "bath salts". The drug is typically seen in a white or pink, foul-smelling crystal form and can be eaten, snorted, injected, or vaporized in an e-cigarette or similar device. Flakka is an extremely dangerous drug. Flakka causes hyperstimulation, paranoia, and hallucinations that can lead to violent aggression and injury. The drug causes extremely high heart rate, blood pressure, violent behavior, self-injury, and has been linked to suicide as well as heart attacks. Flakka is considered to be one of the most dangerous and lethal drugs in society today. Some possible side effects and symptoms of Flakka use are:

- Euphoric sensations
- Rapid heart rate and palpitations
- Increase in blood pressure
- Increase in body temperature
- Alertness
- Paranoia
- Hallucinations
- Aggressive behavior
- Depression
- Tolerance
- Addiction