

# Prescription Drug Misuse and Heroin Use Among MetroWest High School Students

## 2014 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

Prescription drug misuse among young people is a national problem. Over the last decade, there has been increasing attention, in particular, to opioid misuse, which can have severe consequences including addiction, increased emergency room visits, and deaths from overdoses. Opioids can also be a gateway to heroin use, which has risen over the last decade as it has become more attainable and affordable.<sup>1,2</sup> The MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS) has collected data on prescription drug misuse and heroin use since 2006. As defined on the survey, prescription drug misuse comprises use of prescription drugs *without* a doctor's prescription, including use of opioids (such as OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, and codeine) as well as non-opioid drugs (such as Ritalin, Adderall, and Xanax). This sheet provides data from the 2014 survey of 24,355 students in grades 9-12 in all 26 high schools in the region served by the MetroWest Health Foundation. It also displays trends in prescription drug and heroin use from biennial surveys from 2006-2014.

### How many MetroWest teens report prescription drug misuse and heroin use?

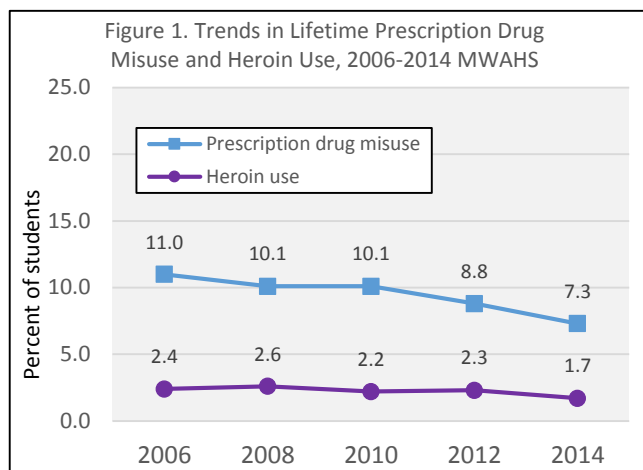
- One in fourteen high school students (7.3%) have misused prescription drugs in their lifetime. Recent prescription drug misuse (in the past 30 days) is reported by 4.1% of high school students. *This includes both opioid and non-opioid prescription drugs.*
- Less than two percent of youth (1.7%) report lifetime heroin use.
- However, among youth who have misused prescription drugs in their lifetime, one in six (17.1%) also have used heroin.

### When do adolescents start using these drugs?

- Lifetime prescription drug misuse increases during the high school years, from 2.9% in 9<sup>th</sup> grade to 11.7% in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Misuse in the past 30 days triples from 1.9% to 6.4% during high school.
- Heroin use increases from 1.1% in 9<sup>th</sup> grade to 2.4% in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### How has use changed over time? (See Figure 1)

- Lifetime prescription drug misuse declined from 11.0% in 2006 to 7.3% in 2014. Recent (past 30-day) misuse also decreased, from 5.7% in 2008 to 4.1% in 2014. Reports are lower among females and males.
- Despite reports of increased heroin use among young adults,<sup>1</sup> the MWAHS shows slightly lower use in 2014 (1.7%) compared with 2006-2012 levels (2.2-2.6%). This is consistent with the link between prescription drug and heroin use.



### Which youth are at greatest risk of misusing prescription drugs?

- Males are more likely than females to misuse prescription drugs (8.2% vs. 6.3%). By 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 14.1% of males and 9.4% of females have misused prescription drugs.
- Youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning (GLBQ) are more than twice as likely as heterosexual youth to report misuse of prescription drugs (13.8% vs. 6.4%).
- Students with lower household income levels, measured by self-reported eligibility to receive free/reduced-price lunch, are more likely to misuse prescription drugs (10.2% vs. 6.6%) than students with higher household incomes.

### Which youth are at greatest risk of using heroin?

- While the numbers are relatively small, males are over three times more likely to use heroin than females (2.7% vs. 0.8%).
- GLBQ youth are over four times as likely to use heroin compared with heterosexual youth (5.7% vs. 1.2%).
- Heroin use is also somewhat higher among youth with lower household income levels compared with youth with higher household incomes (3.1% vs. 1.4%).

### How are prescription drug misuse and heroin use associated with adolescent mental health?

- Youth who have misused prescription drugs are more likely to report depressive symptoms (45.7% vs. 20.1%), self-injury (36.9% vs. 13.5%), and attempting suicide (18.0% vs. 3.4%) in the past 12 months than youth who never misused prescription drugs.
- Similarly, youth who have used heroin are more likely to report depressive symptoms (41.2% vs. 21.7%), self-injury (35.9% vs. 14.9%), and attempting suicide (27.5% vs. 4.1%) compared with youth who have never used heroin.