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Prevention Programs in Middle School May Reduce Later Prescription Drug Use

Substance abuse prevention programs that begin in middle school may help deter prescription drug abuse in later years, new research suggests.

Scientists analyzed findings from three studies of family- and school-based prevention programs designed for rural and small-town middle school students.

They found students who went through substance abuse prevention programs were 20 percent to 65 percent less likely to abuse prescription drugs and opioids when they were between 17 and 25 years old, compared with students who did not participate in the programs. The programs focused on general risk and protective factors of substance abuse.

"Brief universal interventions have potential for public health impact by reducing prescription drug misuse among adolescents and young adults," the researchers wrote in the American Journal of Public Health. "The intervention effects were comparable or even stronger for participants who had started misusing substances prior to the middle school interventions, suggesting that these programs also can be successful in higher-risk groups," lead author Richard Spoth, PhD, from the Partnerships in Prevention Science Institute at Iowa State University in Ames, said in a news release.

Nora Volkow, MD, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, noted that prescription medications can be helpful when they are prescribed to treat pain, anxiety, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. "However, their abuse can have serious consequences. We are especially concerned about prescription drug abuse among teens, who are developmentally at an increased risk for addiction," she said.

Click here to read about NCADD's Ten Tips for Prevention for Youth.