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10% of Teens Treated in the ER Admit to Misusing Prescription Drugs

Ten percent of 14- to 20-year-olds treated in the emergency room for any reason say they have misused prescription drugs at least once in the last year, a new study finds.

The researchers at the University of Michigan found most of the teens who admitted to misusing prescription drugs used other people's medications.

Teens who misused prescription drugs were significantly more likely to also have abused alcohol and non-prescription drugs such as cough medicine, or to have used marijuana, in the past year, the study found. They were also more likely to have ridden with a drinking driver.

The findings appear in the journal *Pediatrics*.

The researchers say this is the first time prescription drug abuse in teens has been studied in an emergency department setting, even though opioid painkillers and sedatives are often prescribed by emergency department doctors, PsychCentral reports.

While school-based studies have found rates of prescription drug misuse among young people to be around 8 percent, these studies do not include teens who have dropped out of school or did not continue their education past high school, the article notes.

Study author Lauren Whiteside, M.D., said the findings suggest that emergency departments could be an effective place to screen teens and young adults for prescription drug misuse, and for intervening early before problems begin. "These patients are often using the emergency department for their medical care, not primary care settings," she noted in a news release. "So, in order to curb this problem and address overdose and addiction, the ED is a good place to start."