

News updates for August 21, 2008

Underage drinking is widespread in the United States. Approximately 12.5 million underage youth drink each year. In 2005, according to self-reports by U.S. students in grades 9-12:

- 74% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more days during their life.
- 26% had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.
- 43% had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more occasions in the past 30 days.
- 26% had five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (i.e., binge drinking) in the past 30 days.
- 4% had at least one drink of alcohol on school property on one or more of the past 30 days.

Parents Warned on Pitfalls of Home Drug Testing

August 12, 2008

News Summary

A number of child health experts are attempting to steer parents away from home drug testing kits for their children and toward professional intervention if they suspect a child may have a drug use problem, U.S. News & World Report posted Aug. 6 on its online U.S. News Health section.

The American Academy of Pediatrics in 2007 issued a statement opposing any home- and school-based drug testing efforts until more research into their effectiveness is conducted. The U.S. News posting lists seven reasons why child health experts say drug testing should be left to professionals; atop the list are concerns that use of home tests will delay the pursuit of professional help, and worries about the reliability of test results (both because of numerous ways for youths to beat the test and the possibility of false positives caused by other medications or poppy seeds).

"My clinical experience tells me that parents are fooled all the time," said Sharon Levy, M.D., a pediatrician and director of the Adolescent Substance Abuse Program at Children's Hospital Boston. Levy said she never recommends that parents use the tests because the results can be misleading and because their use has not been shown to deter drug-using behavior in general.

The posting states that a surge in the number of testing kits on the market has

made it difficult for parents to resist their use. But it relates the story of one family that says it now regrets using the tests. The parents of Indianapolis teenager David Manlove acquired a testing kit over the Internet and believed the tests were showing that their son was reducing his drug use. Instead, the teen had switched to other substances that the tests couldn't detect; he eventually went into treatment but later died after using inhalants with his friends.

"If we had sought professional help earlier, I think we would have had a better chance of preventing this outcome," said David's father, Kim Manlove.

National Methamphetamine Tool Kit a Resource for Communities

July 21, 2006

News Summary

A webcast interview with Kaleen Deatherage of prevention and treatment non-profit Oregon Partnership featured a national 'Tackling Meth' tool kit for communities struggling with methamphetamine problems, according to an Oregon Partnership press release on July 19.

The toolkit includes a training PowerPoint slide library that allows users to customize presentations and a step-by-step Community Action Guide.

"Our guides provide effective strategies for mobilizing community support, for enlisting the support of the media in the battle, and for tackling meth right at the grass roots level", said Deatherage.

In addition to the toolkit, Deatherage discussed Oregon's successful public awareness campaign and recent anti-meth legislation strictly limiting pseudoephedrine sales.

The interview, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration and taped by KATU TV in Portland, was part of a national review of community strategies to combat meth use.

For more information on the toolkit, visit: www.orpartnership.org

PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG-FREE AMERICA RELEASES "THE PARTNERSHIP ATTITUDE TRACKING STUDY (PATS): TEEN'S 2007, AUGUST 2008--Coping with School Stress is Number One Reason Given by Teens for Teen Drug Use

Nearly three-fourths (73%) of teens in grades 7 to 12 believe that “kids use drugs to deal with the pressures and stress of school,” according data from the 20th annual Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS). Other reasons cited by more than half of teens surveyed were to help them feel better about themselves (65%), to look cool (65%), to deal with problems at home (55%), and to improve athletic performance (54%). The least cited reasons for teen drug use were to have fun (26%) and to help study better (20%). Editors note: It is possible that the reasons given would have been different if the survey question had specified the types of drugs being asked about.

Previous surveys of high school and college students have found that motivations vary greatly by type of drug. For example, one survey found that the most common motive for use of prescription stimulants by college students was to increase concentration.

NOTES: The survey was conducted by The Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research North America, for the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. The 2007 PATS survey was conducted in schools and in homes with a nationally projectionable sample of 6,511 adolescents in grades 7 through 12. The margin of error is +/- 1.6%.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Partnership for a Drug-Free America, *The Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS): Teen's 2007 Report*, August 2008. Available online at http://www.drugfree.org/Files/2007_Teen_Survey.

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FDA Considers Training Docs to Prescribe Narcotics
August 20, 2008

News Summary

Amid growing reports of patient deaths and complications caused by problems with legally prescribed pain medication, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is discussing the possibility of requiring doctors to receive specialized training before prescribing narcotics, the [New York Times](#) reported Aug. 16.

The imposition of license requirements such as continuing education on physicians is generally the responsibility of state medical boards, but the FDA is looking into this area because state boards have done little to require training in prescribing pain medication. The federal agency is expected by early next year to release some recommendations, which also may include requiring drug makers to engage in more monitoring of how their products are prescribed.

Federal officials have been frustrated that advisories they have sent to physicians about prescribing dangers associated with the drugs methadone and fentanyl do not appear to be lowering the number of adverse incidents resulting from improper prescribing.

"We are putting out communications," said Gerald Dal Pan, M.D., director of the FDA's office of surveillance and epidemiology. "We don't know why they are failing."

Physicians generally are required only to demonstrate proof of their license in order to receive federal authorization to prescribe narcotics. Some pain management experts fear that if these requirements were made significantly more stringent, some physicians would stop prescribing altogether and consumers would have fewer options for pain management treatment.

Substance Use History Heightens Risk of Postpartum Suicide

August 20, 2008

News Summary

A study has found that women with a history of substance abuse have a six-fold increase in the risk of suicide shortly after giving birth, [Reuters Health](#) reported Aug. 18.

Examining hospital records from women who gave birth in Washington state between 1992 and 2000, researchers compared 355 women hospitalized for a suicide attempt within a year of giving birth with a group of new mothers who had not attempted suicide. The researchers found that women with a substance abuse history were six times more likely to have a postpartum suicide attempt, while women with a psychiatric disorder were 27 times more likely to attempt suicide.

Lead researcher Katherine A. Comtois of the University of Washington School of Medicine and colleagues found that mental health and substance abuse diagnoses clearly are risk factors for postpartum suicide that should be monitored by health care providers and family members. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has recommended that women be routinely screened for psychosocial risk factors during prenatal care.

The researchers found that suicide risk was considerably higher for women who had been hospitalized for substance use or mental health problem five years prior to giving birth.

The study findings were reported in the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology.

College Presidents Rekindle Drinking Age Debate

August 19, 2008

News Summary

A year-old campaign by Middlebury College's former president to launch a discussion of lowering the legal drinking age from 21 to 18 has quietly gained the support of about 100 university presidents, the Associated Press reported Aug. 18.

Duke University, Dartmouth College, Ohio State University, Syracuse University and Tufts University are among the institutions whose presidents have signed onto former Middlebury president John McCardell's Amethyst Initiative. McCardell has said his experience in a college environment has shown him that students will drink regardless of age-21 laws and that making most students' consumption illegal simply drives the activity underground and makes it more dangerous.

But many researchers and groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) consider the initiative's stance

irresponsible, saying it ignores the progress age-21 laws have made in reducing drunk-driving deaths. MADD in fact has told parents that they should question the safety of campuses whose presidents support the Amethyst Initiative.

"It's very clear that the 21-year-old drinking age will not be enforced at these campuses," said Laura Dean-Mooney, MADD's national president.

The college presidents supporting the initiative have signed a statement that does not specifically call for the drinking age to be reduced from 21 to 18, but seeks a debate of the law that tied states' adoption of 21 as the legal drinking age to eligibility for federal highway funds. The statement does indicate that the presidents believe the laws are not working on college campuses, where they say a "culture of dangerous, clandestine binge drinking" has taken hold.

Other college administrators were disinclined to sign off on the initiative. "I remember college campuses when we had 18-year-old drinking ages, and I honestly believe we've made some progress," University of Miami President Donna Shalala said. "To just shift it back down to the high schools makes no sense at all."

Rhodes College president William Trout, a supporter of the initiative, understands that a discussion of the issues will be difficult. "I'm not sure where the dialogue will lead," Trout said, "but it's an important topic to American families and it deserves a straightforward dialogue."

Access to Prescription Drugs Easier for Teens

August 14, 2008

News Summary

A survey of 12-to-17-year-olds conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University revealed that teens are finding it increasingly easy to obtain prescription drugs, and "problem parents" may be contributing to their teens' drug use, the Washington Post reported August 14.

When asked "Which is easiest for someone your age to buy: cigarettes, beer, marijuana, or prescription drugs such as OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin or Ritalin, without a prescription?" 19 percent responded that it was easier to find prescription drugs, compared to 13 percent one year ago. Marijuana remains an easy-access drug for teens, with 43 percent of seventeen-year-olds claiming the drug could be purchased within an hour.

The study also found a correlation between the degree of parental awareness of their teenager's nighttime activity and an increase in illegal and prescription drug use. Of those teens out after 10 pm, one half claim to be with people smoking and taking drugs.

"Half of the teenagers were saying they were out on school nights, but only 14 percent of the parents knew that they were out," said Elizabeth Planet, CASA's director of special projects and the study's coordinator. "There are lots of factors at play here. Parents are not paying attention. There are parents who are out in the evening themselves. There are parents out at work."

Joseph Califano, chairman and president of the center, warns of the danger of parents becoming "passive pushers," as evidenced by the statistic showing that 34 percent of teenage prescription drug abusers obtain them in the home.

"This is a very different generation of children," said Stephen Pasierb, the president of Partnership for a Drug-Free America. "Prescription drugs are entrenched, and they have not moved for five years, and this generation of parents simply [does] not understand the problem."

CASA: National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIII:

Teens and Parents

August 14, 2008

Announcement

From:

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University

633 Third Avenue, 19th Floor

New York, NY 10017-6706

Tel: (212) 841-5200

www.casacolumbia.org/

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Problem parents -- those who fail to monitor their children's school night activities, safeguard their prescription drugs, address the problem of drugs in their children's schools, and set good examples -- increase the risk that their 12- to 17-year old children will smoke, drink, and use illegal and prescription drugs, according to the National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIII: Teens and Parents, the 13th annual back-to-school survey conducted by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University.

"This year's survey reveals that too many mothers and fathers are problem parents who fail to take essential steps to prevent their kids from smoking, drinking or using drugs. By their actions -- and inactions -- by failing to become part of the solution, these parents become part of the problem of teen alcohol and drug abuse," said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA's chairman and president and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. "Indeed, these problem parents enable -- some even encourage -- their 12- to 17-year olds to use and abuse tobacco, alcohol, and illegal and prescription drugs."

Problem Parents & School Night Socializing

The CASA survey found that the later teens are out of the house hanging out with friends on school nights (Monday through Thursday), the likelier alcohol and drug use will be going on among them.

Almost half (46 percent) of 12- to 17-year olds report leaving their house to hang out with friends on school nights. Among these teens:

50 percent who come home after 10:00 p.m. say that drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana or other drug use occurs;

29 percent who come home after 8:00 p.m and before 10:00 p.m. say that drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana or other drug use occurs.

But only 14 percent of parents say their teens usually leave the house to hang out with friends on school nights. "Parents who are not aware of such conduct by their teens, or are not candid about it, are problem parents whose failure to monitor their children's school night activities increases the risk of drug or alcohol use," said Califano.

Problem Parents & Prescription Drugs

For the first time in the CASA survey's history, more teens said prescription drugs were easier to buy than beer (19 vs. 15 percent). The proportion of teens who say prescription drugs are easiest to buy jumped 46 percent since 2007 (13 vs. 19 percent). Almost half (46 percent) of teens say painkillers are the most commonly abused prescription drug among teens.

When teens who know prescription drug abusers were asked where those kids get their drugs:

- 31 percent said from friends or classmates;
- 34 percent said from home, parents or the medicine cabinet;
- 16 percent said other;
- Nine percent said from a drug dealer.

"By leaving abuseable and addictive medications like OxyContin and Vicodin around the house, thus making these drugs readily available to their children, these problem parents become passive pushers," said Califano.

Problem Parents & Drugs in School

Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of high schoolers and one in five (21 percent) middle schoolers say drugs are used, kept or sold on their school grounds. The survey also found that 44 percent of high school students and 16 percent of middle school students know a place near their school, but off school grounds, where kids go to get high.

Ninety-seven percent of all parents surveyed and 96 percent of parents who believe their teens' schools are not drug free say it is important that their teen's school be drug free. Yet 42 percent of parents think their teens' school is not drug free, and only 39 percent of those parents believe making the school drug free is a realistic goal. One-third of parents believe that the presence of illegal drugs in their teen's school does not make it more likely that their teen will try them.

Problem Parents & Prevalent Pot

One-quarter of teens surveyed know a parent of a classmate or friend who uses marijuana; 10 percent of teens say this parent smokes marijuana with people the teen's age.

Forty-two percent of 12- to 17-year olds can buy marijuana in a day or less; 23 percent in an hour or less. Compared to last year, this is a 35 percent increase in teens who can buy marijuana in an hour or less (23 vs. 17 percent) and a 14 percent increase in teens who can buy marijuana in a day or less (42 vs. 37 percent). From 2007 to 2008 this represents an increase of 1.4 million teens who can buy marijuana in an hour or less (5.8 vs. 4.4 million), and an increase of 1.1 million teens who can buy marijuana in a day or less (10.6 vs. 9.5 million).

Half of 16- and 17-year olds say that among their age group smoking marijuana is more common than smoking cigarettes.

Marijuana continues to be easier to buy than beer: 23 percent of teens find it easiest to buy compared to 15 percent who find beer easiest to buy.

Teen Alcohol Preferences

One-third of teens who drink say they like the taste of alcohol. When teens were asked what type of alcoholic beverage they prefer:

- 29 percent said liquor mixed with cola or something sweet;
- 16 percent said wine;
- 16 percent said beer;
- 13 percent said straight liquor.

While the same proportion of boys and girls prefer liquor mixed with something sweet (29 percent each), more boys than girls prefer beer (22 vs. 10 percent), and more girls than boys prefer wine (20 vs. 13 percent).

For the 13th year, drugs top the list of teen concerns. In response to an open-ended question, 28 percent of teens cite drugs as the biggest problem they face, compared to only 17 percent of parents who see drugs as the top teen concern.

Compared to the time when they were growing up, parents overwhelmingly say it is harder today to keep kids safe (84 percent) and to raise a teen "of good moral character" (72 percent).

"Every mother and father should look in the mirror and ask themselves if they are doing the parenting essential to help their child negotiate the difficult teen years free of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs," said Elizabeth Planet, CASA's Director of Special Projects who managed this survey.

"Preventing substance abuse among teens is primarily a Mom and Pop operation," noted Califano. "It is inexcusable that so many parents fail to appropriately monitor their children, fail to keep dangerous prescription drugs out of the reach of their children and tolerate drug infected schools. The parents who smoke marijuana with children should be considered child abusers. By identifying the characteristics of problem parents we seek to identify actions that parents can take—and avoid—in order to become part of the solution and raise healthy, drug-free children."

Spike in Methadone Prescriptions, Deaths

August 18, 2008

News Summary

Methadone now ranks as the fastest-growing source of narcotic deaths in the country, and many experts believe lack of federal oversight and dangerous prescribing practices by physicians are largely to blame, the New York Times reported Aug. 17.

The number of methadone prescriptions increased by 700 percent from 1998 to 2006 -- a period during which the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) unwittingly labeled package inserts with a dangerously high dosage recommendation of up to 80 mg per day for a starting dose.

The FDA cut the recommended starting dose to 30 mg in late 2006, but some experts believe the FDA should also require physicians to take special classes on prescribing narcotics, a move the agency is considering.

"This is a wonderful medicine used appropriately, but an unforgiving medicine used inappropriately," said Howard A. Heit, M.D., a Georgetown University pain specialist. "Many legitimate patients, following the direction of the doctor, have run into trouble with methadone, including death."

Nationally, the number of deaths in which methadone was listed as a contributing factor increased fivefold to 4,462 from 1999-2005, but experts say that figure understates the problem because of incomplete reporting in some states. Florida saw its deaths caused at least in part by methadone increase from 367 in 2003 to 785 in 2007.

Many health experts believe doctors who are increasingly prescribing the medication for pain management do not have enough knowledge of how slowly methadone is metabolized, or how various patients can experience different effects from the medication. They say some physicians prescribe too much of the drug too fast, while others do not inform patients of the risks of using alcohol or sedatives with the medication.

As a result of these problems, some physicians have instituted innovative practices in conjunction with prescribing methadone for pain management, including contracts with patients that list mutual obligations or occasional phone calls from the physician to a patient's loved ones to check on the patient's progress.

