

California State Senate



SENATOR
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ELEVENTH SENATE DISTRICT

Fact Sheet: Senate Bill 514 (Simitian)
Cough Syrup and Dextromethorphan (DXM) Abuse

SB 514: Summary

Senate Bill 514 would prohibit the sale of non-prescription drugs containing dextromethorphan (DXM) to minors.

Dextromethorphan is a cough suppressant commonly found in over-the-counter cold and cough medications.

Some consumers, including minors, purchase and consume large quantities of products that contain DXM in order to get high. This problem is significant and widespread.

Need for the Bill

Ingesting too much cold medicine can be just as hazardous as drinking too much alcohol or abusing other drugs. And it is cheap, easy and legal for children to obtain.

According to WebMD and the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, **one in ten teenagers say they've used DXM to get high**—making it more popular than LSD, cocaine, ecstasy or meth.

The fact that DXM is legal and readily available over-the-counter suggests that these products are entirely safe. That false sense of security has been identified as a contributing factor in abuse. Age specific limitations will help communicate to teens and their parents that there are serious consequences associated with inappropriate use.

The California Poison Control System reports that telephone consultations provided for patients aged 6-17 regarding abuse of dextromethorphan increased by 850% in the last ten years; making DXM the most commonly reported substance in this age group.

This trend of dextromethorphan abuse in California is paralleled nationally by statistics reported to the Toxic Exposure Surveillance System (TESS) of the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) as well as the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN).

In 2010, a national survey of 45,000 teenagers conducted by a team of scientists at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research found that 3.2 percent, 5.1 percent, and 6.6 percent of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, respectively, claimed dextromethorphan abuse during the previous year.

When used in the doses recommended on cough syrup and tablet packaging, dextromethorphan is a very effective cough suppressant. When taken at much higher doses, however, it causes hallucinations, loss of motor control, and disassociative "out-of-body" sensations similar to PCP and ketamine (Special K). At high doses, dextromethorphan is also a central nervous system depressant.

Abusing DXM is known by the street names: Triple-C, Candy, Dex, DM, Drex, Red Devils, Robo, Rojo, Skittles, Tussin, Velvet, and Vitamin D. Those who use the cough syrup to get high are sometimes called "syrup heads" and the act of abusing DXM is often called "dexing," "robotripping," or "robodosing" (because users chug Robitussin or another cough syrup to get high).

Possible side effects of dextromethorphan abuse include:

- Hallucinations
- Slurred speech, poor coordination and inability to move
- Disassociative "out-of-body" sensations
- Dizziness, confusion, blurred vision
- Nausea, vomiting
- Rapid heart rate, dilated pupils
- Paranoia
- Lethargy, numbness of fingers and toes
- Seizures, brain damage
- Heart attack
- Death

The internet is the easiest way for young people to obtain information on getting high with over-the-counter medications. Many web sites encourage teenagers to abuse DXM and actually offer "recipes" for the best way to achieve the desired high based on a user's height and weight, how to combine DXM-containing medicines with other drugs, and what effects are to be expected at specific dosage levels.