

The DAWN Report

Data Spotlight

November 30, 2012

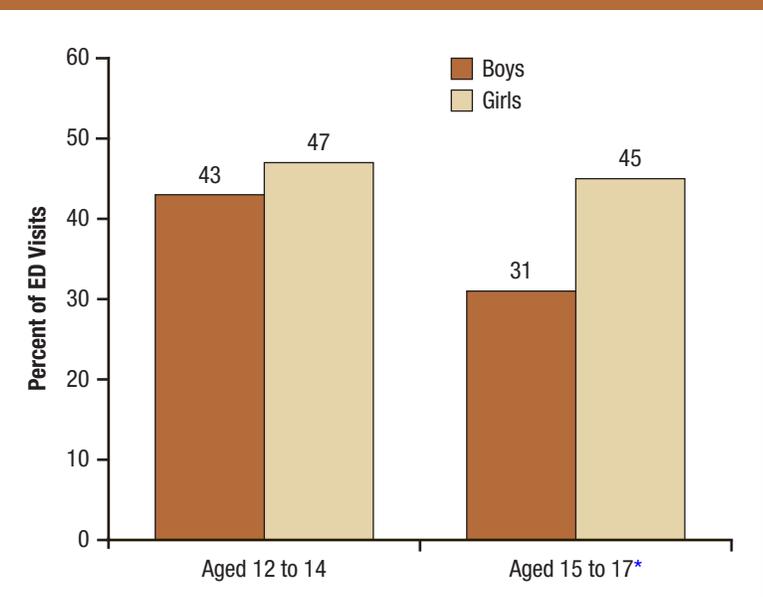


Drug Misuse or Abuse-Related Emergency Department Visits Involving Nonmedical Use of Pharmaceuticals Vary by Gender among Older Adolescents

Nonmedical use of prescription medications is on the rise among U.S. teens, resulting in dangerous health consequences.¹ In 2010, an estimated 66,517 emergency department (ED) visits involving nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals² were made by adolescents aged 12 to 17, accounting for about two fifths (39 percent) of all drug-related ED visits involving misuse or abuse of drugs in this age group. Data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) show that the proportion of visits involving nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals varied by gender among older adolescents aged 15 to 17. Among ED visits involving misuse or abuse of drugs by younger adolescents aged 12 to 14, 47 percent of visits made by girls and 43 percent of visits made by boys involved nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals (Figure); however, the difference was not statistically significant. Among older adolescents aged 15 to 17, the difference between girls and boys was significant (45 vs. 31 percent involved nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals).

Parents may not be aware of the range of drugs available to adolescents. Although illicit drugs and alcohol may be difficult to obtain, pharmaceuticals with potential for misuse may be obtained from friends or relatives or, in the case of over-the-counter (OTC) medications, may be purchased at a store.¹ Because of the higher risk for older adolescent girls, substance use prevention messages addressing prescription and OTC medication misuse are relevant during middle school and should continue through the high school years. For more information on teen girls and drug use, please visit <http://www.theantidrug.com/advice/teens-today/girls-drugs/default.aspx>.

Nonmedical Use of Pharmaceuticals Involved in Emergency Department (ED) Visits Related to Drug Misuse or Abuse among Adolescents, by Gender and Age Group: 2010



* The difference between boys and girls is statistically significant at the .05 level.

1. Friedman, R. A. (2006). The changing face of teenage drug abuse—The trend toward prescription drugs. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 354(14), 1448-1450.
2. Nonmedical use includes taking more than the prescribed dose of a prescription medication or more than the recommended dose of an OTC medication or supplement; taking a prescription medication prescribed for another individual; being deliberately poisoned with a pharmaceutical by another person; and misusing or abusing a prescription medication, an OTC medication, or a dietary supplement.

Source: The Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) is a public health surveillance system that monitors drug-related hospital emergency department (ED) visits and drug-related deaths to track the impact of drug use, misuse, and abuse in the United States.

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