

DXM

CONNECTICUT Clearinghouse

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DXM (dextromethorphan)

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

What is DXM?

DXM (dextromethorphan) is a cough suppressant available in a variety of over-the-counter cough and cold medications. DXM is abused because, when taken in doses that dramatically exceed those recommended by physicians and pharmacists, it produces hallucinations and a sense of dissociation.



What does DXM look like?

As an over-the-counter medication, DXM is available in various forms including liquids, lozenges, tablets, capsules, and gel caps. In addition, DXM powder--prepared by extracting the drug from cough syrup--increasingly is being sold via the Internet.

How is DXM abused?

In the past, cough syrup was the most commonly abused form of the drug. Abusers consumed large doses--usually at least half an 8-ounce bottle--by drinking the liquid very quickly. (Consumption of large quantities of cough syrup induces vomiting. Thus, to achieve the desired effects, abusers must drink the product quickly enough to allow the body to absorb the DXM before vomiting occurs.) The availability of powdered extractions of DXM has resulted in abusers either inhaling the powder (snorting) or repackaging it in capsules, which are then swallowed.

Who abuses DXM?

It is difficult to gauge the extent of DXM abuse in the United States because most data sources that provide estimates of drug abuse do not report data regarding DXM. Law enforcement sources indicate that teenagers and young adults are the principal abusers of DXM. Sold over the counter on open shelves, medications containing DXM are readily available and even susceptible to shoplifting. Their accessibility and relatively low price make them particularly attractive to young people, especially compared to illicit drugs.

What are the risks?

DXM is generally safe when users adhere to recommended doses (15 to 30 milligrams). However, individuals who abuse DXM consume much higher doses (typically more than 360 milligrams), which produce hallucinations and dissociative effects similar to those experienced with PCP (phencyclidine) or ketamine. While under the influence of the drug, which can last for as long as 6 hours, DXM abusers risk injuring themselves and others because of the drug's effects on visual perception and cognitive processes. In addition, individuals who ingest high doses of DXM risk hyperthermia (exceptionally high fever), particularly if they use the drug in a hot environment or while physically exerting themselves--such as at a rave or dance club. Other risks associated with DXM abuse include nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, headache, numbness of fingers and toes, loss of consciousness, seizures, brain damage, and death. Over-the-counter medications containing DXM frequently contain other ingredients that can cause additional health problems.

What is it called?

Slang Terms: *Dex * DM * Drex * Robo * Rojo
Skittles * Triple C * Velvet*

Is DXM illegal?

No, DXM is not illegal. The drug is available without a prescription because, when used properly, it has proven to be a safe and effective means of cough suppression. Reports of DXM abuse, however, have resulted in monitoring by the Drug Enforcement Administration, and DXM could be added to the Controlled Substances Act if warranted.

Information Provided by:
National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC)
U.S. Department of Justice
www.usdoj.gov/ndic
814-532-4601

dxm020304