

## Action

What should be done if you suspect someone is abusing these products?

1. Try to find out the exact product being abused; get the bottle or package if possible. Knowing the ingredients will help doctors treat the person.
2. Anyone with symptoms like abdominal pain and vomiting, sleepiness, restlessness or mood changes could need immediate treatment in an emergency room. If the product is available, send it along.
3. Call the Wisconsin Poison Center to get product information, advice or for any questions about the situation.



Call toll-free seven days a week.

For hearing impaired:  
**TTY (414) 266-2542**

Interpreters are available to help all non-English speaking callers.



Wisconsin  
Poison Center

PO Box 1997  
Milwaukee, WI 53201-1997

1-800-222-1222  
[wisconsinpoison.org](http://wisconsinpoison.org)

## Over-the-counter cough and cold medication abuse



What parents and teachers  
need to know



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## Facts

### Abuse of over-the-counter cough and cold medications

1. Abuse is common among students in middle school and high school. Adults also abuse these products.
2. Information about which products to use can be found on the Internet. While such websites may mention the risks, they advertise the use of over-the-counter medications as a cheap and legal way to get “high.”
3. Misuse of these products often has very serious effects and can even cause death.

### Why do children abuse these products?

Dextromethorphan is a common medicine used to control cough and is available in many products. This substance is from a family of drugs known as depressants or sedatives. When taken in large amounts, it can give a person a “high” or cause someone to think he or she is seeing things.

## Dangers

### Why are these products so dangerous?

When abused, dextromethorphan can cause sleepiness and even coma. If this happens while driving, someone could get hurt in a car accident. Besides addiction, this medicine also can cause people to fall or have trouble breathing.

### Other dangerous ingredients

Cold and cough products have decongestants, antihistamines, and pain relievers or fever reducers in them. People abusing these products don’t realize the risks involved.

Decongestants can cause high blood pressure that can lead to a stroke.

Antihistamines can cause a fast heartbeat, abnormal heart rhythm, coma and seizures.

The pain reliever acetaminophen in high doses can cause liver damage or failure.

## Signs

### What are the signs of abuse?

Parents and teachers may notice mood changes.

Abusers often become hyperactive and may not be able to pay attention in class or have trouble doing homework. Abusers may feel their heart is “racing,” or feel dizzy or lightheaded. Stomach pain and vomiting can be early signs of liver damage.

