



Opiate and Heroin Use in Waukesha County

Parenting is a challenge at any stage of development, but parenting teens can be complicated, since teens deal with more pressures than ever before. These pressures can lead to risky behaviors, **including drug use.**

Risky decisions are due to a number of factors at this age:

- **The decision-making frontal lobe of brain is not fully developed until age 25**
- **Peer pressure by others through social networks (Facebook, etc)**
- **Access to substances at home (alcohol, prescription drugs)**
- **Independence as they drive, work and spend time with friends**

There are concerns about drug use in Waukesha County, due to the increased availability of heroin in our community. There is also a **growing concern with opiate drug use – this includes prescription pain medication.** A Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services National Survey **found that over 70 percent of youth who abused pain medication got it from a friend or family member.** Many heroin users report that their addiction began by using prescription pain medication from their own medicine cabinet or from a medicine cabinet at the home of a friend. As the pain medication became expensive or inaccessible, they turned to a cheaper street alternative, heroin.

In a Waukesha Freeman article on June 2, 2014, Waukesha County District Attorney, Brad Schimmel, addressed Wisconsin's heroin epidemic. He called heroin, "**the top public safety issue facing our state and families.**" He cited statistics which show an **increase of more than 300% since 1995 in the number of Wisconsin teens trying heroin, a 50% jump since 2007 in the number of heroin deaths in the state and a significant increase in the potency of the heroin now available in the community.**

An April 17, 2014 Waukesha Freeman article discusses the gravity of the problem. **Of the 35 drug-related deaths in 2013 analyzed by the Waukesha County medical examiner's office, 10 were directly related to heroin, compared with 21 fatal overdoses recorded in 2012.**

Most of the fatal drug overdoses last year in Waukesha County were related to opiate prescription medication alone or in combination with another substance. Those totaled 21 of the 35 drug-related deaths. Six additional cases from 2013 are being reviewed, so the numbers may fluctuate.

Parents need to be aware of ***possible signs of use:*** **problems in school, behavior changes, dilated or pinpoint pupils, finding paraphernalia (rolling papers, pipes, etc.) and evidence of access to drug related websites. Parents also need to purge the medicine cabinet of any outdated pain medications or keep current medications locked up.** A good website for parents to find out more specific information is the National Institute of Health (NIH) at www.drugabuse.gov.

Don't panic, but do act right away - start talking! Let your child know that you are concerned – communicate your disapproval, set limits in reference to rules and consequences, monitor your child's behavior, continue to look for signs, and get professional help. In Waukesha County, **call 211 or go to www.impactinc.org** for additional resources and help.