

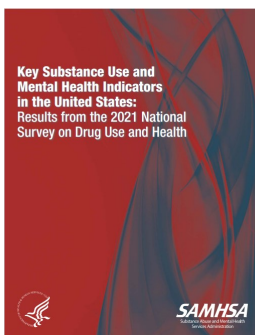
THE ANTIDOTE

News and Notes from the Blue Ridge Poison Center at UVA Health

Drug Diversion: What is it? How is it linked to prescription drug misuse?

In January 2023, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) released findings from [The 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#). This annual survey collects information on tobacco, alcohol, illicit drug use, substance use disorder, and other mental health issues among people ages 12 and up in the United States. “As the findings make clear, millions of Americans young and old faced mental health and substance use challenges – sometimes both at once – during the second year of the pandemic,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra.

Here are some highlights from the report related to drug misuse:



- 8.7 million people aged 12 and older misused prescription pain medication. In fact, this was the *second most common type of illicit drug* used after marijuana.
- 4.9 million people misused prescription tranquilizers or sedatives.
- 3.7 million people misused prescription stimulants.
- 46.3 million people (or 16.5% of the population) met the criteria for having a substance use disorder, or SUD. This is a medical condition in which a person continues to use a substance knowing it will cause problems with their health or their ability to function in day-to-day life.

Why would someone misuse prescription drugs?

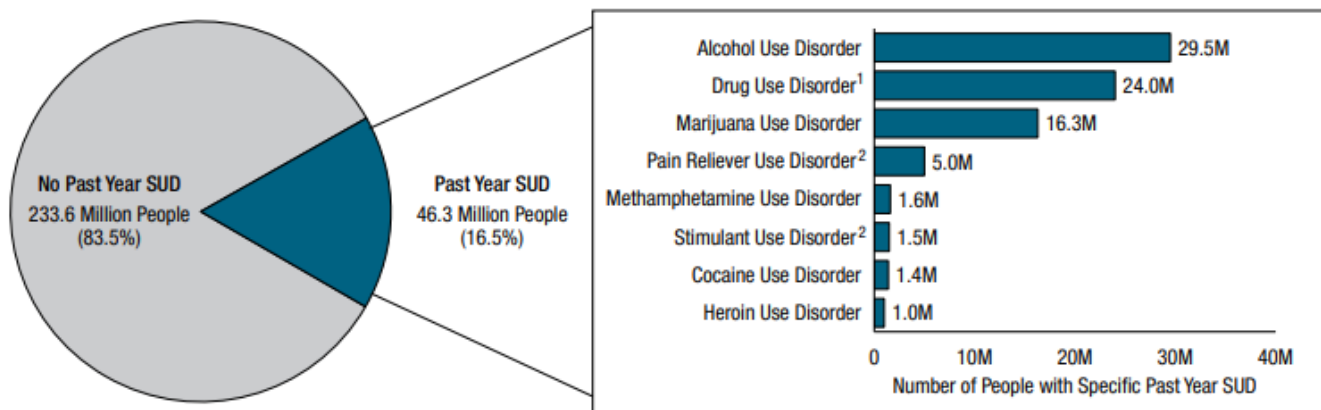
There are many reasons for prescription drug misuse. Some people are trying to manage illnesses or injuries without the care of a health professional. Others believe wrongly that these drugs will help them lose weight, relax, have more fun, or study more effectively. But using prescription drugs for the wrong reasons has serious risks for a person's health.



What is 'Drug Diversion' and how does it contribute to the problem?

Drug diversion is the sharing or selling of prescription medications to people who do not have a prescription. The SAMHSA report shows that drug diversion is a huge factor contributing to the problem of drug misuse and substance use disorders. Drug diversion can happen when someone:

- Is untruthful with healthcare providers in order to get prescription medications.
- Steals, buys, or accepts prescription medications from someone who is not a licensed provider.



Past Year Illicit Drug Use: Among People Aged 12 or Older; 2021 (SAMHSA Dec. 2022)

The most common diverted prescription medications are:

- *Opioids*—for treating pain.
- *Central nervous system depressants (sedatives)* —for treating anxiety and sleep problems.
- *Stimulants*—most often prescribed to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Where do diverted drugs come from?

Diverted prescription medications can be found through unregulated and illegal 'black market' sources, often online or on social media. But the SAMHSA report shows that a large number-- 45%-- of people who took someone else's prescription pain medications got them directly from a friend or family member. Nearly 4% admitted to stealing them.

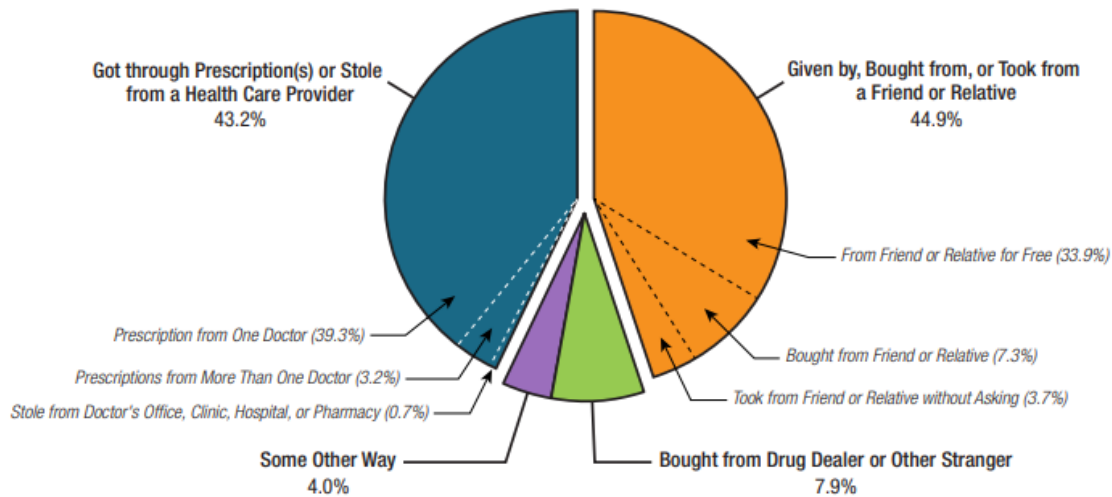
What are the health concerns?

Drug diversion is illegal. It is also dangerous. If you misuse prescription medications, you could experience an allergic reaction, an interaction with other medications you take, or serious side effects. Taking prescription medications without a healthcare provider's supervision can lead to addiction and overdose. Furthermore, many drugs sold through black market sources turn out to be *counterfeit*, or fake. Criminal drug traffickers make these fake pills look exactly like real prescription medicines such as Oxycontin, Xanax, or Adderall. People buy them believing that they are the same pills you would get from



"I live alone and my grandkids are grown. It never occurred to me that I should keep my pain pills hidden. I was shocked to discover my medicine bottle completely empty the day after filling the prescription. I needed that medicine for my back pain, and it cost a lot of money. Who stole the pills? Was it the house painters who were in my home all day? My grandson's friends? Or my neighbor who has a key for emergencies? I'll never know." ~Anonymous

Poison Trivia answer: True.



Source Where Pain Relievers Were Obtained for Most Recent Misuse: Among People Aged 12 or Older Who Misused Pain Relievers in the Past Year; 2021. (SAMHSA Dec. 2022)

the doctor. But fake pills often contain different, unapproved ingredients. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) seized more than 20 million fake pills in 2021 alone. Many of those pills were found to contain lethal amounts of fentanyl, a powerful man-made opioid.

What can be done?

Lawmakers, prescribers, and law enforcement officers are all working to prevent drug diversion. But they need your help, too. Even if you live alone, your prescription medicines could be at risk. Here are FIVE STEPS you can take:

1. **Keep track** of the medications in your home. How many pills should be in each bottle? What should they should look like?
2. **Lock medications** in a special medicine lock box. Find them online and at most pharmacies.
3. **Store** medications in a place known only to you. Avoid obvious places like the medicine cabinet or kitchen counter. (If young children are ever in your home, make sure this secret place is up high, out of their sight and reach.)
4. **Get rid** of leftover or expired medications.
5. **Scratch off** or cover up labels before tossing empty pill containers.



There is no way to be certain about the purity or strength of medicine you can get through unregulated sources. You have no idea what's in it.

—Dr. Nathan Charlton, Associate Director, Blue Ridge Poison Center, UVA Health



How can I get help?

- If you suspect someone has overdosed or is experiencing bad health effects from *any* substance, call the **Blue Ridge Poison Center**, day or night. Our experts will tell you exactly what to do. **1-800-222-1222**. Free and confidential.
- If you or someone you know needs help with a substance use disorder, call **SAMHSA's National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)** for referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Free and confidential.
- For parents: [Catching it Early](#). From the **Partnership to End Addiction** at Drugfree.org.

NEW LOOK—SAME GREAT SERVICE

In October 2022, the American Association of Poison Control Centers; representing all 55 of the nation's poison centers; updated its brand with new colors and a new logo. The organization also changed its name to **America's Poison Centers**. The Blue Ridge Poison Center at UVA Health welcomes this new, modern look and we are slowly incorporating it into all of our materials. But don't worry, our expert staff haven't changed and our toll-free hotline is the same: **1-800-222-1222**. [>>Read More](#)



National Poisoning Prevention Week is March 19-25, 2023. All newsletter subscribers will receive our **Partner's Toolkit**, featuring shareable social media graphics, printable flyers, and links to videos & other tools. Contact Education Coordinator Kristin Wenger at 434-982-4386 or KLW2S@UVAHEALTH.ORG.

POISON TRIVIA:

True or False? Pregnant or nursing mothers who use cannabis can pass it to their baby.

Answer on page 2

The Blue Ridge Poison Center is affiliated with University of Virginia Health. Other funding sources include the Virginia Department of Health and HRSA. We are accredited by America's Poison Centers. Proudly serving the Commonwealth since 1978. [Join the mailing list](#) to receive this quarterly newsletter, or visit www.brpc.virginia.edu.

