

Parents' prescription drugs often springboard for teens

By Ed Runyan (Contact)

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NILES — Though illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin make news the most when cops make an inner-city drug raid, a possibly greater danger lurks in the average medicine cabinet: prescription drugs.

Statistics show that children age 12 and 13 who are getting high for the first time are experimenting with prescription medicines, said Lt. Jeff Orr, commander of the Trumbull Ashtabula Group Law Enforcement Task Force.

A recent Partnership for a Drug-Free America study says one in five teenagers has taken a prescription painkiller to get high.

“They [young kids] are probably more likely to experiment with prescription drugs,” Orr said. “But as they get older, they turn away from pills in that 14- to 15-year-old cycle and they get into marijuana,” he told a gathering of counselors Tuesday in the Eastwood Mall.

The presentation, billed as “an officer’s view of what is happening on our streets,” was sponsored by the Trumbull County Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention.

An adult might have the narcotics Vicodin or OxyContin in the house for pain relief, but young people using such pills don’t realize that these drugs are dangerous on the same level as heroin, officials say.

Kids use them because they are easily accessible, Orr said. Frequently when a young person gets hooked on Vicodin or OxyContin, he turns to heroin when the supply of prescription drugs is gone, Orr said. An OxyContin pill costs \$40 to \$60, but heroin is selling for around \$20, Orr said.

Parents should be careful with their prescription drugs, Orr said. They should count them and keep them locked up.

Doctors share the blame, Orr said. “Some doctors overprescribe these drugs,” Orr said, noting that doctors sometimes bill a patient hundreds of dollars to write a prescription without even seeing the patient.

In some cases, doctors are prescribing a narcotic to an addict or someone who is turning around and selling the drug for money, Orr said.

Marijuana is the most abused drug in America, Orr said, and produces the most revenue for its growers and handlers.

It also has a deceptive lure, Orr said, which is why he calls it the “killer drug.”

Because some people advocate making marijuana legal, many young people think it’s safe. But based on his experience, marijuana is a gateway to other drugs, Orr said.

“You find marijuana in every drug house,” Orr said, meaning that wherever marijuana is found, there is a good chance more- dangerous drugs will be there.

Once a person is associating with people using marijuana, they are “in that circle” of people using other drugs, and they “take the next step to try something else,” Orr said.

TAG seizes marijuana in Trumbull and Ashtabula counties each year in elaborate indoor growing operations and in cornfields. The outdoor plants are usually planted in April or May and harvested in August or September, he said.

TAG has made a number of heroin raids in Warren in recent months. The problem is difficult to stamp out, Orr said, because some of the people selling the drug say they have no other way to make a living and will return to the drug trade when they get out of prison.

Orr passed around samples of some of the most commonly abused drugs in the Mahoning Valley so that the 50 or so people in attendance could see the drugs up close.