



# ONDCP

## Office of National Drug Control Policy

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **New Data Reveal Doubling of Emergency Department Visits Involving Pharmaceutical Abuse**

*White House Drug Policy Director Highlights Growing Public Health Toll of the "Prescription Drug Abuse Epidemic"*

WASHINGTON—According to new data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), visits by individuals to hospital emergency rooms involving the misuse or abuse of pharmaceutical drugs have doubled over the past five years and, for the third year in a row, exceed the number of visits involving illicit drugs.

According to DAWN, which provides national estimates on individuals who experience drug-related medical emergencies that are severe enough to require treatment in an emergency department, there were approximately 1.2 million visits by individuals to hospital emergency rooms involving pharmaceutical drugs in 2009. This compares to about 974,000 visits involving illicit drugs in 2009.

Additionally, while visits to emergency rooms involving illicit drugs have remained relatively stable at just under 1 million visits per year from 2004 to 2009, visits involving pharmaceutical drugs have almost doubled – increasing by 98 percent over the past five years. In 2009, there were approximately 1.2 million visits to emergency rooms involving pharmaceutical drugs, compared to 627,000 in 2004. These visits do not include adverse reactions to pharmaceuticals taken as prescribed.

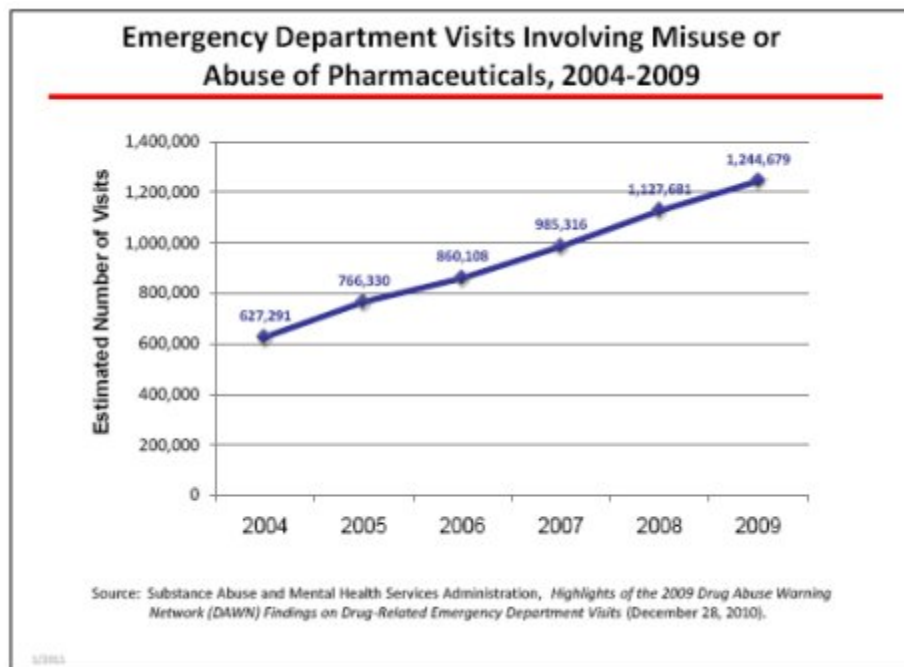
"Prescription drug abuse is our Nation's fastest-growing drug problem, with shocking consequences measured by overdose deaths, emergency room visits, treatment admissions, and increases in youth drug use, said Gil Kerlikowske, Director of National Drug Control Policy. "The Obama Administration is mounting an unprecedented effort to address this public health epidemic, and as we coordinate a national response to reduce drug use and its consequences, we need communities to be our partners in this effort. Parents should act today to protect young people by talking to their kids about the consequences of drug use, even legal drugs such as prescription drugs, and by properly disposing of unused, expired, or unneeded medications found at home."

The Obama Administration is mounting an unprecedented government-wide effort to combat prescription drug abuse. These efforts include:

- Increasing prescription drug return, take-back, and disposal programs across the Nation. Prescription drugs that are commonly abused are often found in the family medicine cabinet. In October 2010, President Obama signed into law the Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act, which will support local efforts to curb prescription drug abuse by providing Americans with safe,

environmentally sound ways to dispose of unused, unneeded, or expired prescription drugs found at home.

- Expanding state-based prescription drug monitoring programs. Currently, monitoring programs are operating in 34 states. The Administration supports expanding these programs in every state, and is seeking to ensure new and existing monitoring programs effectively use the data they acquire and share information across state lines.
- Educating prescribers about opiate painkiller prescribing. The Administration's FY 2011 Budget request asks Congress for funding to train prescribers on how to instruct patients in the use and proper disposal of painkillers, to observe signs of dependence, and to use state-based prescription drug monitoring programs to detect when an individual is going from doctor to doctor in search of prescriptions (also called "doctor shopping").
- Assisting states in cracking down on doctor shopping and so-called "pill mills." Criminal organizations have established thriving businesses of transporting people to states with little regulation to obtain prescription drugs from multiple doctors or from "pill mills," which distribute drugs indiscriminately. ONDCP is working closely with Federal, state, local, and tribal authorities to address this problem.



DAWN data are based on a national sample of general, non-Federal hospitals operating 24-hour emergency departments. In each participating hospital, emergency department medical records are reviewed retrospectively to determine visits that involved recent drug use. All types of drugs—illegal drugs, prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, and non-pharmaceutical inhalants—are included.

Click [here](#) to see the full DAWN report.

For more information on how to properly dispose of prescription drugs click [here](#).  
For more information on National efforts to reduce drug use and its consequences visit [www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.gov](http://www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.gov)

*The Office of National Drug Control Policy seeks to foster healthy individuals and safe communities by effectively leading the Nation's effort to reduce drug use and its consequences.*

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