

Support Legislation to Restrict Minors' Access to Cough Medicine Containing Dextromethorphan

Summary: Every year, millions of Americans use over-the-counter (OTC) medicines containing dextromethorphan (DXM) to relieve cough symptoms. Cough medicine with DXM has been available over the counter in the United States for more than 50 years and is safe and effective when taken as recommended. However, according to the 2013 National Institute on Drug Abuse study, *Monitoring the Future*, four percent of teenagers have intentionally taken exceedingly large amounts of cough medicine containing DXM to get high.

To help combat the small number of teens who abuse DXM, CHPA urges passage of legislation that would prohibit the sale of dextromethorphan to those under 18 years of age without a prescription.

This simple step would maintain access to effective OTC cough medicine for millions of Americans who use it to treat cough symptoms associated with colds and the flu while limiting access to the small but significant number of adolescents who might abuse it.

Background

DXM is Used Safely by Millions of Americans Each Year

DXM is a safe and effective ingredient found in more than 100 OTC cough and cold medicines. The ingredient was first approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the 1950s and is an effective, non-narcotic cough suppressant that works through a central action on the cough center in the brain. It is the most widely used cough suppressant in the United States. There are no studies showing conclusively that it produces any physical dependence.

The Abuse of DXM has been Observed in a Small Percentage of Adolescents and Young Adults

According to the 2013 National Institute on Drug Abuse study, *Monitoring the Future*, four percent of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders (2.9 percent, 4.3 percent, and 5 percent, respectively) report they have intentionally consumed excessive amounts of cough medicine. However, only half of those repeat the behavior after their first trial, and only 1 of 4 repeat the behavior after 3 trials. At high doses (e.g. 8 to 50 times the maximum labeled dose), DXM can produce hallucinations, confusion, blurred vision, nausea, excessive fatigue, and loss of motor control.

States Taking Action to Restrict Access to Minors

On August 31, 2011, California became the first state to restrict minors' access to DXM when Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 514 into law ([Chapter 199](#)).

On September 27, 2013 New York became the second state to adopt similar restrictions when Governor Andrew Cuomo signed into law [SB 696-B / AB 933-B](#).

On March 3, 2014 Virginia became the third state to adopt similar restrictions when Governor Terry McAuliffe signed into law [HB 505](#).

On March 27, 2014 Washington Governor Jay Inslee signed [HB 2163](#) into law making it the fourth state to restrict minors' access to DXM products.

On April 23, 2014 Arizona became the fifth state to adopt similar restrictions when Governor Jan Brewer signed [HB 2086](#) into law.

On May 23, 2014 Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal signed [HB 514](#) into law. Louisiana is the sixth state to pass legislation restricting minors' access to DXM products.