



**ROANOKE AREA YOUTH  
SUBSTANCE ABUSE COALITION**

[www.RAYSAC.org](http://www.RAYSAC.org)

# **RAYSAC Radar!**

## **Prescription Drug Abuse Leading Teens to Heroin**

Drug Enforcement Agents explain that prescription drug medications are the new gateway drug for teens, forming an expensive dependence that leads kids to look for cheaper ways to get high. According to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, on an average day 2,500 teenagers will abuse prescription medication. One in 20 people in the U.S. age 12 and older in 2010 reported using prescription painkillers to get high, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Local 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data indicates that 5.7% of Roanoke Valley (Botetourt County, Craig County, Roanoke City and Salem City) 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students had ever used heroin.

Teenagers are getting pills from their parents' medicine cabinets. When pills become too expensive and provide an insufficient high, they turn to heroin. Heroin is often far cheaper than its prescription counterparts. A single pill of Vicodin or Oxycontin can be anywhere from \$40 to \$75, while a small bag of heroin may cost less than a six pack of beer and achieve the same high. For anyone already addicted to prescription opioids, cheap, accessible heroin may seem like a much better deal. Adding to the problem is the fact that today's heroin is as much as 15 times as potent as the heroin of decades past. When you combine this factor with the low price and increased accessibility of the drug, teens are in grave danger. Even when it wasn't so potent, heroin was already one of the most dangerous and addictive illicit drugs on the market.

Lack of education and misinformation is a problem. There are many myths and false rumors about use of heroin. For example, some experts say that the sudden increase of teenage heroin overdoses over the past few years is a result of a mistaken belief that snorting heroin is less dangerous and less addictive than injecting. Bad information about hard drugs like heroin can lead teens to put their lives in danger without even knowing it.

### **The Truth About Heroin:**

- ♥ Heroin affects the brain because it enters the brain quickly. It slows down thinking, reaction time and memory. This affects the way decisions are made.
- ♥ Heroin is highly addictive. It affects the parts of the brain that are responsible for producing physical dependence.
- ♥ Heroin affects the body, especially if injected. There is a risk of HIV, hepatitis B and C and other diseases that can occur from sharing needles.
- ♥ Heroin use can result in death. It is one of the most frequently reported drugs by medical examiners in drug abuse deaths. ([www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov))

Parents need to educate their teens about the dangers of all drug, and alcohol use. Talk to your teens....they will listen!