



Peak Ages of Risk for Starting Nonmedical Use of Prescription Stimulants

Publication Brief

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to generate nationally representative, age-specific incidence rate estimates of nonmedical use of prescription stimulants (e.g., Adderall, Dexedrine, Ritalin, Concerta) and peak ages of onset among young people aged 12 to 21 in the U.S.

Background

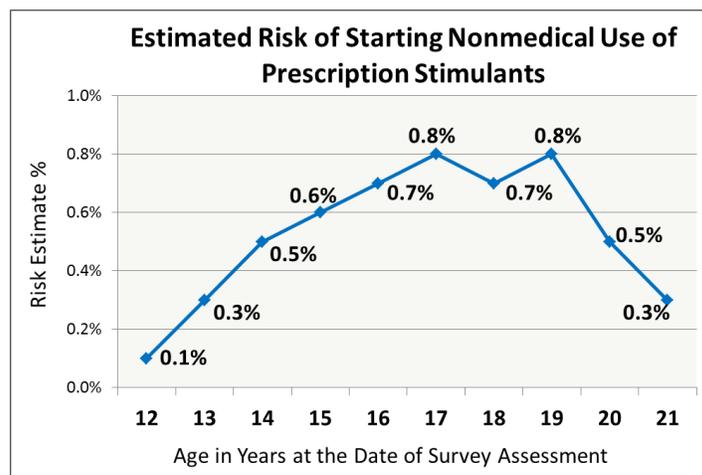
Prescription drug abuse is a severe and growing problem in the U.S. today. Previous research studies report on past-year and lifetime prevalence rates of nonmedical use of stimulants. However, analyzing first time nonmedical use (i.e., peak ages of onset) and age-specific incidence rates provides information necessary for designing effective primary prevention interventions.

Methods

Nonmedical use of prescription stimulants was collected using the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), years 2004 through 2012. Subpopulations of youth aged 12 to 21 years (n=240,160) included in this analysis are: 1) never users (youth still at risk for onset) and 2) new users (youth who started to use for the first time within the past 12 months). Individuals that initiated non-medical use prior to the year in which they were surveyed were not included.

Key Findings

- The risk of starting nonmedical use of prescription stimulants was highest among youth between ages 16 and 19 years (see figure).
- Between the ages of 14 and 19 years, females were more likely than males to start nonmedical use of stimulants at every age, except at age 17.
- At age 18, females reported the highest annual rate of starting nonmedical use of prescription stimulants (1%), while males of the same age had a rate of 0.5%.



Implications

Findings from this study indicate the peak annual incidence rates for starting nonmedical use of prescription stimulants occurred between the ages of 16 and 19 years. These data suggest implementing prevention programs during the early adolescent years may be the most effective time to prevent first time use or future dependence of prescription stimulants.

Citation

Austic E. Peak ages of risk for starting nonmedical use of prescription stimulants. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. 2015;152:224-229. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2015.03.034.