

DEWS ALERT Dextromethorphan (DXM)

Drug Scan (the DEWS interview project) contacts in Frederick County report an increase in the use of DXM among adolescents and young adults. The drug is believed to be most popular with individuals involved in the "club scene."

What is Dextromethorphan? Dextromethorphan, commonly known as DXM, is the cough suppressant found in many over-the-counter cough medicines. DXM is not an illegal drug.

How is DXM used? DXM can be ingested by drinking large doses of cough syrups containing this drug. It can also be extracted from cough medicines to be taken orally or injected. Instructions on how to extract DXM from its original source (such as cough syrup or gel capsules) are available on several DXM-related internet sites.

How is DXM obtained? The most common way is by purchasing nonprescription cough medicines that contain DXM. The internet is also becoming a source for obtaining the drug. A number of DXM-related websites list specific information on companies that sell the DXM itself, and there have been media reports of teenagers ordering the substance from the internet. Findings from Drug Scan indicate that DXM has recently become available--in both powder and pill form--in the illicit marketplace in Frederick County.

What are the effects of DXM use? The drug produces feelings of euphoria and enhanced awareness that can last 4 to 6 hours. Adverse effects can include impaired judgment and mental performance, loss of coordination, dizziness, nausea, hot flashes, dissociation, and hallucinations. It may trigger panic attacks or seizures in susceptible individuals. Chronic DXM use can cause permanent brain damage. DXM taken in combination with other drugs (such as some antidepressants) may cause liver damage, brain damage, or death. Use of DXM in cough medicine form may be dangerous, even fatal, if the medicine contains other ingredients such as antihistamine, pseudoephedrine, or acetaminophen.

What are the street names for DXM? DXM is also known as "dex," "dextro," "syrup," "robo," "rome," and "X." DXM that is injected may be referred to as "romilar," or "K." Using DXM is called "robodosing," "robotripping," and "robocopping"--slang words derived from the brand-name cough syrup, Robitussin. An 8-ounce bottle of cough syrup is an "eighter."

The DEWS Alert is a special issue of the DEWS Fax that CESAR uses to share information about new drugs appearing in the state. It is our hope that building an understanding about a drug before it becomes a problem may help prevent a crisis from occurring. A complete list of sources used in this fax is available on the DEWS website (www.cesar.umd.edu/DEWS.html).
