



For Immediate Release:

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Prescription Drug Abuse on the Rise in LA County New Public Health report outlines local data and recommendations

LOS ANGELES – In LA County drug overdose has become the third leading cause of injury and death, according to a report released by the Department of Public Health today. The report, *Prescription Drug Abuse in Los Angeles County: Background and Recommendations for Action*, highlights the trends in national and local prescription drug abuse and provides recommendations for action in three key areas to address prescription drug abuse: training and education, tracking and monitoring, and disposal.

“Prescription drug abuse has become a growing public health concern in Los Angeles County. Many people are not aware that the misuse or abuse of prescription drugs can be as dangerous as illegal drugs, and can lead to unintended injury, addiction, and even death,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “We need to ensure that we are addressing this growing concern by engaging and collaborating with our partners in the public and private sectors to reduce and prevent prescription drug abuse.”

Prescription drug related health problems have increased in Los Angeles County. Although a national survey recently reported a decrease in the number of people aged 18 to 25 who used prescription drugs for non-medical purposes in the past month, prescription drug overdose is the leading cause of drug-related emergency department visits in Los Angeles County, and continues to grow in prevalence among our youth.

Other key findings from the report include:

- From 2000 to 2009, toxicology reports found 8,265 drug-related deaths occurred and approximately 60% of those deaths involved a commonly abused prescription/over-the-counter drug.
- Publically funded substance abuse facilities reported treatment admissions increased by 50% for prescription drug abuse of opioid pain relievers from 2005 to 2010.
- Over one-third of all drug-related hospitalizations in LA County had a primary diagnosis of prescription/over-the-counter drug overdose.
- In LA County, 37% of students in continuation, community day or alternative high schools reported misuse of prescription painkillers at least once in their lifetime.

“To address prescription drug abuse in Los Angeles County, we established recommendations based on the documented accomplishments from other jurisdictions that have taken steps to reduce and prevent prescription drug abuse,” said John Viernes, Jr., Director of Substance Abuse Prevention and Control. “This will not be a small job. We will need parents, patients, educators, health care providers, and manufacturers to participate in the process in order to reduce prescription drug abuse.”



Public Health News

For a full copy of the report, *Prescription Drug Abuse in Los Angeles County: Background and Recommendations for Action*, visit the department's Substance Abuse Prevention and Control webpage at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

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