Study: Nonfatal stimulant overdoses rising among youths, young adults
by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

An increasing number of youths and young adults are experiencing nonfatal overdoses from stimulant use, according to a new study.

Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also found nonfatal overdoses for any drug rising among young children, while nonfatal heroin overdoses declined for older teens and young adults.

The study used 2016-’19 emergency department (ED) data from the CDC’s National Syndromic Surveillance Program BioSense Platform for youths and young adults up to 24 years.

Among children ages 10 and under, about 22 of every 10,000 ED visits were for a nonfatal drug overdose. The overdose rate was 43 per 10,000 ED visits for youths ages 11-14 and 85 per 10,000 visits for ages 15-24, according to "Suspected Nonfatal Drug-related Overdoses Among Youth in the US: 2016-2019," (Roehler DR, et al. Pediatrics. Dec. 7, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-003491).

The average quarterly increase in nonfatal overdoses for any drug was about 2% for both the 0-10 age group and the 11-14 age group. The average quarterly change for ages 15-24 was nearly zero.

All three age groups saw average quarterly increases for nonfatal stimulant overdoses: 3% for children 10 and under, 4% for ages 11-14 and 2% for ages 15-24.

The study also showed nonfatal heroin overdoses for ages 15-24 decreased by an average of 3% per quarter.

Authors called for targeted interventions to prevent stimulant overdoses.

"Interventions that include aspects of individual, school, family, and community coordinated care have shown promise at reducing or preventing substance use among youth," they wrote. "Yet, substantial gaps in the evidence for youth-focused substance use interventions remain, especially among youth who may have already developed a substance use disorder."

They recommended that clinicians prescribing opioids use the lowest effective dose and that they provide naloxone access to youths who misuse opioids or other illicit drugs that may contain fentanyl.

To prevent overdoses in young children, which often are unintentional, medication packaging should be childproof, and parents and guardians should store medications in a secure location.

The authors of a related commentary said more research is needed on which stimulants are involved in overdoses and also called for clinicians to advocate for evidence-based prevention programming.

"Given that preliminary national 2019 data suggest that overdose rates have once again resumed their climb, addressing stimulant misuse and overdose early in the life course is urgent," they wrote.

Resources
- AAP policy "Substance Use Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment"
Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on stimulants

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Screening to Brief Intervention tool

Brief Screener for Tobacco, Alcohol and other Drugs