

7 in 10 U.S. workplaces hit by opioid abuse: survey

11 March 2017



(HealthDay)—Prescription drug abuse has seeped into the American workplace, with 70 percent of businesses saying it affects their workers, a new survey reveals.

The National Safety Council report also found that while 71 percent of employers believe that abuse of opioid prescription painkillers is a disease that requires treatment, 65 percent also consider it a justifiable reason to fire a worker.

"Employers must understand that the most dangerously misused drug today may be sitting in employees' medicine cabinets," said Deborah Hersman, president and CEO of the safety council.

"Even when they are taken as prescribed, [prescription drugs](#) and opioids can impair workers and create hazards on the job. We hope these findings prompt employers to take the lead on this emerging issue so that workplaces can be as safe as possible," she added in a safety council news release.

But the survey findings showed that employers have a long way to go on this front.

Only 19 percent of employers said they felt "extremely prepared" to deal with [prescription drug abuse](#) in their workplace, only 13 percent were "very confident" that workers could spot signs of misuse, and 76 percent do not offer training on the topic.

Fifty-seven percent of employers said all employees underwent drug testing. Of those who conduct drug testing, 41 percent do not test for synthetic opioids such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and fentanyl, the findings showed.

The survey also found that 81 percent of employers' policies lack at least one major element of an effective drug-free workplace program.

While 88 percent of employers said they would be interested in having their insurer cover alternative pain relief treatments so workers could avoid taking narcotic painkillers, 30 percent of those employers said they would not act on that interest.

On a positive note, 70 percent of employers did say they would help workers struggling with [prescription drug abuse](#) return to their jobs after completing treatment.

The survey was released online March 9 by the National Safety Council.

The United States is currently in the throes of an unprecedented opioid epidemic. More than six out of 10 overdose deaths involve opioid drugs, and 91 Americans die every day from [prescription opioids](#) or heroin, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Deaths from prescription painkillers—such as oxycodone (Oxycontin)—as well as heroin and methadone have more than quadrupled since 1999,

according to the CDC.

More information: SOURCE: National Safety Council, news release, March 9, 2017

The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more about [prescription drug abuse](#).

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APA citation: 7 in 10 U.S. workplaces hit by opioid abuse: survey (2017, March 11) retrieved 27 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-03-workplaces-opioid-abuse-survey.html>

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