



THE NEW FACE OF HEROIN ADDICTION: ILLINOIS TEENS

"There's blood running in the streets, but no one's paying attention. They just walk over it like it's a puddle. I (tell parents), 'Do you understand that unless you're prepared, this could happen to you?' They think it can't happen to them, so they tune out."

- Lea Minalga, a Geneva mother whose son is recovering from heroin addiction

Daily Herald, December 18, 2009.

Recently, there has evolved a disturbing trend among teens, and men and women in their early 20s: an increase in heroin use and deaths from overdose. In 2009, more than 100 young people in northern Illinois died as a result of heroin overdose.

What is Heroin?

Derived from the opium poppy, heroin is a white powdery mix or a brown tar-like substance. Both forms are a **highly addictive and potentially lethal depressant**. Heroin can be smoked, snorted, or injected.

Over the past decade, the market for heroin in Illinois has dramatically changed. Once thought to be exclusive to the inner city and used by older adults, heroin has seen a surge in use by suburban youth seeking a cheap high.

Why the Rise in Youth Heroin Use?

Research is ongoing, but initial findings provide a few insights:

- Teens don't perceive heroin as dangerous, but like prescription painkillers like Oxycontin or Vicodin.
- A small bag of heroin may be cheaper than beer or more accessible than an illicit prescription.
- Anti-heroin measures by law enforcement have targeted adults, while the vast majority of teen prevention efforts have been focused on alcohol.
- This generation of heroin users has more money to spend; more mobility to seek out their suppliers.

Why Illinois?

Location is everything. Chicago is a major destination as well as a transshipment point for heroin bound for other Midwest- and Great Lakes- area destinations. Commercial aircraft and traffic on the extensive interstate system provide convenient transport for heroin.

What are the Signs of Heroin Use?

- Deteriorating appearance, weight loss
- Slowed motor skills, cloudy thinking
- Loss of interest in school, work, family, and favorite activities
- Withdrawn, depressed, tired and careless about appearance
- Relationships with family members deteriorate
- Hanging out with a new group of friends
- Red-rimmed eyes and a runny nose, even without a cold or allergies
- Changed eating and sleeping patterns
- Avoiding eye contact
- Secretive behavior, including lying and locked doors
- Hyperactivity or unusual aggression
- Finding pipes, lighters and rolling papers in teen's possession
- Disappearing money, valuables and prescriptions

Help and Recovery is Possible

Teens can recover from heroin addiction, but ignoring the signs and symptoms is not the answer. If you suspect that your teen is using heroin talk to them about it before it's too late, before they become this year's statistic. Illinois has several treatment programs for youth suffering from addiction to heroin. Contact your local treatment provider for more information. To find a local provider call 866-213-0548 or visit <http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/>.

