



Xanax Use Among Teens: What We Need to Know

Over the past 12 months, an increasing number of education, police and health care professionals on Vancouver Island have expressed concern about the use of Alprazolam (Xanax[®]) among teens in their communities, including Victoria, Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo, Parksville, Port Alberni, Comox Valley and Campbell River. These concerns are supported by reports from teens themselves. There have also been incidents reported of acute intoxications of teens at school, suspected overdose incidents involving emergency response and seizures by local police.

What is Xanax?

Xanax is a medication from the benzodiazepine family that functions as a central nervous system depressant. It is commonly used to treat various forms of anxiety and panic disorders, as well as insomnia, by decreasing abnormal excitement in the brain.

What are the effects and risks?

Xanax, like other prescription tranquilizers, is intended to slow normal brain activity and function, which may result in slowed breathing (respiratory depression), slurred speech, dilated pupils, disorientation, fatigue and decreased coordination. In high dosages, Xanax can, "...cause impaired memory, judgment and coordination; irritability; paranoia; and thoughts of suicide. Some people can become agitated or aggressive." ([Parent Drug Guide: Know the Facts about Xanax](#))

Repeated use of Xanax can lead to dependence, which can result in withdrawal symptoms when use is reduced or stopped. Talk to a medical professional to develop a safe strategy for reducing use. Tolerance to Xanax can develop quickly, causing an individual to consume higher dosages to achieve the same result, increasing the risk of harming themselves. This includes the potential for overdose, particularly when taken with other depressants such as alcohol, benzodiazepines and/or opioids (i.e. fentanyl, heroin and morphine).

What are the sources of Xanax?

There is no sure way to confirm how teens are getting Xanax. It appears that access to Xanax, and other prescription medications, are likely from a prescription by physicians and/or psychiatrists (which could include misuse of another person's prescription like a sibling or parent); purchased from a friend or dealer; or purchased from the internet or dark web.

Information from local police departments suggests there are likely two streams of Xanax in circulation: legitimate and illicit versions. A legitimate form of Xanax would include pills obtained through a direct prescription, used by the individual they've been prescribed to, or diverted from another person's prescription. These pills are regulated pharmaceutical quality.

Xanax Use Among Teens: What We Need to Know - p2

There is also an illicit stream of unregulated Xanax, which has been made from a combination of chemical agents to produce something intended to resemble the appearance and effect of the pharmaceutical version. This poses further significant risk to the person using Xanax outside of prescribed use, as it is very difficult to distinguish a legitimate pill from a fake pill, and the effects from each are likely to vary from pill to pill, including the dosage and interactions with other drugs.

Signs and Symptoms of Acute Toxicity (Overdose):

- Extreme drowsiness
- Fainting; loss of consciousness
- Difficulty breathing; respiratory depression
- Loss coordination; muscle weakness
- Confusion
- Light headedness

If someone has signs and symptoms of acute toxicity they need urgent medical assistance.

Suggestions and Tips for Talking to a Teen:

- It's important to keep lines of communication open and to have honest and non-judgemental conversations with your teen—this will create trust and encourage openness
- Approach the conversation with curiosity and interest
- Ask for their opinions
- Focus on your concerns for their safety
- Know the facts about the drug
- Understand and address your own fears before starting the conversation

Supportive Resources for Youth & Families on Vancouver Island:

- **South Island:** call 250-519-5313 or email discovery.southisland@viha.ca
- **Central/North Island:** call 250-739-5790 or email discovery@viha.ca

For more information:

- www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-abuse/prescription-drug-abuse/benzodiazepines
- bodyandhealth.canada.com/drug/getdrug/xanax
- drugfree.org/drug/xanax (Parent Drug Guide: Know the Facts about Xanax)
- www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/hs-parents-list.pdf