

the shifting face of drug abuse

"There's a new dealer in town," blares a national ad campaign created by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The dealer's name is, of course, the family medicine cabinet. That's because teenagers are abusing prescription drugs more and more in the midst of an overall decline in drug use.

By the time they are seniors in high school, a little more than a third of all teenagers (36 percent) have experimented with illegal drugs. A brief rundown of what's hot and not:

HOT

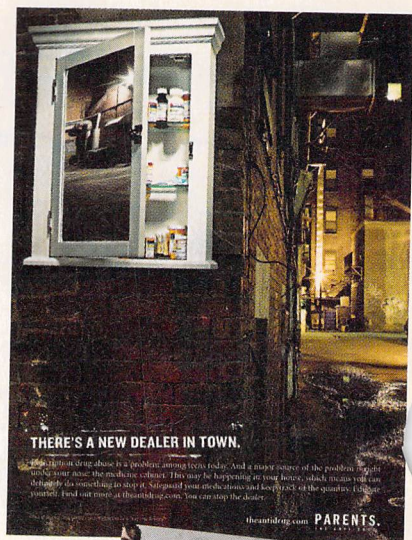
■ OXYCONTIN, VICODIN, AND COUGH MEDICINE—

From 2002, when researchers first started tracking the over-the-counter painkiller OxyContin, the number of teenagers who say they've used the drug to get high has increased by 30 percent. At the same time abuse of cough medicines, despite radical steps taken to remove them from grocery store aisles, is steady (about 6 percent of high school seniors abuse them).

■ MARIJUANA, SALVIA, AND HOOKAHS—

Marijuana is still the most widely used illegal drug among teenagers (about a third of all seniors say they've smoked it in the last year), but a more dangerous smokable herb is fast gaining traction—it's called salvia. Native to Mexico, the salvia herb (nicknamed Sally-D, Magic Mint, and Diviner's Sage) is a hallucinogenic that's way less expensive than marijuana and can still be bought legally in many states. Jonathan Appel, a Tiffin University professor who's studied salvia's emergence, says: "Parents, I would say, are pretty clueless. It's much more powerful than marijuana." Meanwhile, hookah bars are gaining in popularity, especially in college towns where popular myth embraces the Middle Eastern water pipe practice as a safer alternative to cigarettes. Not so, say researchers—one 45-minute session in a hookah bar exposes the user to 100 to 200 times the smoke from a single cigarette.

■ **ECSTASY**—Fewer kids believe Ecstasy is dangerous, and that corresponds with a slight increase in its abuse over the past few years.



NOT

■ **METHAMPHETAMINE**—The biggest success story in the fight against illegal drug use among teenagers is that meth use is down by two-thirds since 1999. Just 2 percent of seniors abuse the dangerous drug.

■ **STEROIDS**—Abuse of steroids among teenage boys has dropped by more than half from its peak levels in the early 2000s.

■ **ALCOHOL**—Though not statistically significant, the raw numbers of kids abusing alcohol in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades has declined.