

Drug War

By Kirsten Weir

Illegal drugs contribute to crime and violence around the world and around the corner.

For Catelin S., it began with marijuana. "I started smoking weed at 11," she told *Current Health*. Soon she graduated to illegally acquired prescription pills and drugs such as methamphetamine and cocaine.

At 16, after getting into trouble with the law, Catelin went to live at Phoenix House, a drug treatment center in Dallas. There, she's getting the help she needs to stay clean. "I've learned there's a whole lot more to life," she says.

When she was getting high, Catelin rarely thought much about where the drugs came from. Her parents both had addiction problems, and she bought drugs from her uncle and other family members. "I never really went to extremes to get it, and I never went through people I didn't know," she says. Catelin may not have gone far to find her fix. The drugs she took, though, might have been world travelers.

The illegal drug trade is an international problem. Drug trafficking—the illegal buying and selling of drugs—contributes to crime and violence around the world and even helps fund terrorism. Catelin learned the hard way that drug use has terrible personal consequences. But the choice to do drugs also has consequences for people and communities around the globe.

Out of Control

For evidence of the drug trade's impacts, just look across the border. In recent years, drug violence in Mexico has spiraled out of control. Rival gangs fight one another for a larger share of the drug market. Marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin all travel Mexico's drug smuggling routes on the way to the United States.

Since 2006, more than 28,000 people have been killed in Mexico's drug violence. The victims aren't just drug dealers. Police officers, soldiers, journalists, and innocent bystanders have also been kidnapped and murdered.

Mexico's president has argued that the United States plays a part in all that violence. Almost all the drugs trafficked through Mexico end up in the hands

of American drug users such as Catelin. In fact, Mexico is the biggest supplier of marijuana to the United States.

Elsewhere, drugs do similar damage. For decades, Colombia has grown most of the world's coca, the plant that is turned into cocaine. The cocaine trade has led to high rates of violence there. In the past, the drug trade corrupted Colombia's justice system when powerful members of the drug gangs, known as cartels, were elected to government positions.

Recently, western Africa has become a prime site for trafficking, says David Mineta, deputy director of Demand Reduction, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. "These international criminal organizations smuggle people, arms, and narcotics through [western] Africa," he says. From there, the illegal goods are transported to Europe, North America, and other places around the world.

The Poppy Problem

The state of affairs is also grim in Afghanistan. Ninety percent of the world's supply of opium poppies is grown in that country. The poppies are used to make heroin, a dangerous and highly addictive drug.

The drug money flows right into the pockets of terrorist groups, says Gretchen Peters, author of *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda*. The Taliban are extremists who ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Although they no longer head the government, they are still a powerful force in the country. U.S. forces have been fighting Taliban-led rebel groups since the war in Afghanistan began in 2001.

The Taliban severely restrict women's rights in areas they control, and they support Al Qaeda terrorists. They also are involved in the drug business. "The drug trade is run by trafficking organizations that work very closely with the Taliban," Peters says. The Taliban protect poppy farmers, drug labs, and drug shipments in Afghanistan. In return, they demand taxes from the people they protect. The United Nations estimated that the Taliban earned \$600 million from drug taxes between 2005 and 2008. "There's an enormous output of narcotics in this part of the world," says Peters. "It's like the Walmart of drugs."

In some ways, though, the situation in Afghanistan is not unique. In many places where drugs are grown, processed, or traded, they're linked to rebel groups and terrorists. "What you see is a connection between organized crime and groups that want to destabilize countries around the world, whether it's rebels in Colombia or the Taliban in Afghanistan or insurgents in

Sri Lanka or Burma," Peters says. In other words, the drug trade directly benefits rebels and terrorists who are making the world a more dangerous place.

Reducing Demand

The United States is taking steps to address the international drug problem. In Colombia, Mineta says, the U.S. government is working with the national police force to rein in cocaine traffickers. In Afghanistan, U.S. forces are going after drug labs and destroying stockpiles of narcotics. They are also trying to help farmers shift to growing legal crops. But in a poor country where many people depend on the valuable poppy crops to survive, that's a difficult switch. "It takes a lot of time and money and intervention," Peters says.

Reducing global drug violence depends on reducing demand for illegal substances, Mineta says. The United States is the world's biggest consumer of illegal drugs. And teens do their fair share of drug use: According to Students Against Destructive Decisions, half of all American teens try an illicit drug by the time they finish high school.

As was the case with Catelin, most teens don't give much thought to where their drugs come from—or what illegal activity they might have fueled. But every action, including choosing to use drugs, has a consequence. "Until we can find a way to reduce the demand for illegal drugs," Peters says, "we're going to continue to have problems."

Homegrown Harm

Some drugs are grown or manufactured in the United States. But just because they're not connected to terrorism or trafficking doesn't mean they don't have a harmful impact on society. Drug users are more likely to commit crimes such as theft or assault. And drug-related gang rivalries contribute to violence in cities across the country.



Bloomberg/Getty
Images
Methamphetamine
labs are a local
source of danger.

Production of methamphetamine is a growing problem. Meth is often produced in home labs. For every pound that's made, 5 to 6 pounds of toxic waste is left behind. People have become ill after moving into houses that were once meth labs.

Bottom line? Drugs are deadly—and not just for the people who use them.



Zoran Milic/iStock

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which illegal drug is made from opium poppies?

- A heroin
- B cocaine
- C marijuana
- D meth

2. The illegal drug trade is a worldwide problem. According to the passage, all of the following are effects of the problem EXCEPT

- A the reduction of crime
- B funding for terrorism
- C drug-related gang rivalries
- D violence around the world

3. After reading the passage, what can you conclude will most likely happen in the next few years?

- A Farmers in poor countries will stop growing illegal crops.
- B The illegal drug trade will continue to be a problem.
- C Illegal drugs will no longer be grown in the United States.
- D Drug-related violence in Mexico will be greatly reduced.

4. Read this sentence from the passage: "What you see is a connection between organized crime and groups that want to destabilize countries around the world, whether it's rebels in Colombia or the Taliban in Afghanistan or insurgents in Sri Lanka or Burma," Peters says."

In this sentence, the word **destabilize** means

- A to offer care or guidance
- B to volunteer for a cause
- C to upset the functioning of
- D to fight for independence

5. Which statement supports the central idea of this passage?

- A Illegal drugs contribute to crime and violence around the world.
- B Catelin S. was lucky to have received help from a drug treatment center.
- C Drug violence in Mexico has spiraled out of control in recent years.
- D Drug users are more likely to commit crimes such as theft or assault.

6. According to the passage, what country is the world's biggest consumer of illegal substances?

7. Author Gretchen Peters said, "There's an enormous output of narcotics in this part of the world. It's like the Walmart of drugs." What might she have meant by that? [paragraph 3 under "The Poppy Problem"]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin have been smuggled _____ Mexico to the United States.

- A before
- B from
- C to
- D as

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

In Afghanistan, U.S. forces are addressing the international drug problem by going after drug labs and destroying stockpiles of narcotics.

Who? U.S. forces

Where? _____

(are doing) What? _____

How? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** intervention: the process of coming between in order to change a course of events.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1140

Featured Text Structure: Cause/Effect – the writer presents the reason an event happened and its results

Passage Summary: “Drug War” describes how illegal drugs are contributing to crime and violence around the world.

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- B cocaine
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Suggested answer: The United States is the world's biggest consumer of illegal drugs.
[paragraph 2 under "Reducing Demand"]

7. Author Gretchen Peters said, "There's an enormous output of narcotics in this part of the world. It's like the Walmart of drugs." What might she have meant by that? [paragraph 3 under "The Poppy Problem"]

Suggested answer: Peters probably meant that so many narcotics are being shipped out of Afghanistan that they're as common and widespread as the popular international chain store Walmart.

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Where? **in Afghanistan**

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How? **by going after drug labs and destroying stockpiles of narcotics**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** intervention: the process of coming between in order to change a course of events.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.