

# Safe Use of Opioids In Children

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Your healthcare provider gave your child an opioid pain medication to treat your child's moderate to severe pain. Opioids are strong medications that provide good pain relief but may cause harm.

## What are the dangers of opioid medications?

- **Dependence and/or Addiction.** Over time, people taking opioid pain medicines develop tolerance to it. This means that the same dose (amount) of medicine will be less effective to help with pain, even if the side effects (such as constipation) persist. This tolerance leads to **dependence**, which means that the body feels a need for the medicine. It could possibly lead to **addiction**, which is when this need interferes with daily life. Dependence can develop when the medicine is used as prescribed. Addiction occurs when the medicine is abused.

Using opioids for acute pain has a low risk of addiction, but some patients have higher risk.

This risk is higher in patients who:

- Use opioids for a longer period of time
  - Smoke tobacco
  - Use or have a history of using alcohol and/or recreational drugs
  - Have a history of mental illness
- **Overdose.** Signs of a opioid pain medicine overdose are cold and sweaty skin, confusion, shaking, extreme sleepiness, trouble breathing, and coma.
  - **Coma.** Opioids slow down breathing to the point that they can put you in a coma. This means nothing can wake you up.
  - **Death.** Many people die from inappropriate use of opioids which is a leading cause for drug related death.
    - If you use a CPAP machine for sleep apnea, it is especially important to use it while on an opioid based analgesic.

## **What are the guidelines to keep my child and my family safe?**

### **1. Be aware of potential Side Effects, when to call your doctor and when to call 911**

Use of opioids may affect your child's ability to learn and participate in activities. They are also at a higher risk of falling. Talk with your healthcare provider about activities your child need to avoid while taking opioids.

Prior to your child taking first dose of medication, read patient counseling information which comes with your prescription provided by the manufacturer. Contact your child's health care provider if you have any further questions about this.

Common side effects of opioids are constipation, nausea and vomiting, itching or a rash while on opioids. Tell your child's healthcare provider if they have any of these symptoms. To prevent constipation, your healthcare provider will also give your child medications to help promote bowel movements.

If your child has any of the following symptoms, they may be **taking the wrong dose**. Call you healthcare provider if your child has:

- Intoxicated behavior - confusion, slurred speech, stumbling.
- Feeling dizzy or faint.
- Feeling or acting very drowsy or groggy, or nodding off to sleep.
- Unusual snoring, gasping, or snorting during sleep.
- Difficulty waking-up from sleep and becoming alert or staying awake.

If you can't reach your doctor call the National Poison Hotline at (800) 222-1222.

### **2. Know the signs of the overdose and what to do.**

Family and friends of people who take opioids need to know the signs of an overdose so they can act quickly if it happens. Discuss the signs and

symptoms of an overdose with anyone who stays with your child so they will call 911 and give \* naloxone if the child has:

- Trouble breathing such as shortness of breath, slow or light breathing or stopped breathing.
- Slow or unusual heartbeat or stopped heartbeat.
- Inability to be aroused or wakened.
- Inability to talk if awakened.
- Gurgling noises coming from mouth or throat.
- Limp body, that may seem lifeless.
- Pale or clammy face.
- Fingernails or lips turned blue/purple.

\* **Naloxone** is a medication that reverses the effects of a drug overdose. It is available in many pharmacies in Michigan without a prescription. Talk to your health care provider to see if this is relevant for your child.

**3. Never give a child an opioid pain medication that was not prescribed to them**

Everyone responds differently to pain medications. What is safe for one person may not be safe for another. Government statistics show that many people share their medications and that sharing opioids leads to great harm.

**4. Never adjust your child's dose without consulting with the doctor who prescribed the opioid**

Even after the effects of the opioid seem to have worn off, the medication may still be depressing your child's breathing so taking more than the doctor instructed may be dangerous. Do not expect opioid medications to remove all pain. If your child is still in pain after taking the opioid as your doctor prescribed, talk to your doctor about safer ways to control the pain.

**5. Never mix opioids with alcohol**

This combination can be dangerous. This is because alcohol increases the harmful effects of opioid pain medication. Most overdose deaths from opioids also involved at least one other drug or alcohol.

**6. Never mix opioids with sleep aids or anti-anxiety medications**

This is another dangerous combination. Combining pain medications with sleep aids or anti-anxiety medications can increase the toxic effects of the pain medication. Sleep aids and anti-anxiety medications are often found together with opioids in the blood of people who died from opioid pain medicine. If your child has anxiety, pain at night or trouble sleeping, speak to your healthcare provider about safer ways to manage these problems.

**7. Always tell your healthcare provider about all medications and supplements your child is taking from any source**

Drug interactions may be dangerous. Certain medications and supplements, including over-the-counter products, herbs, supplements or other drugs can react with opioids and either increase or reduce the effect the medication in your body. You can give other medications **only if** the healthcare provider who prescribed your opioid medications directed you to do so.

**8. Create a list** of all your child's prescribed medications, over-the-counter drugs and natural supplements and show it to your pharmacist whenever a medication is added or changed. To do this, write down the names of all prescriptions your child takes for longer than two weeks. Next to the name note the date the medication was added or changed, the dosage and how often your child takes it. You can use the Log at:

<https://tinyurl.com/yajropqx> to track your medications.

**9. Keep pain medications locked in a safe place**

Opioid pain prescriptions may be deadly if children, teenagers or other family members take them by accident. Make sure you keep these medications locked and away from the reach of children and do not share

them with other family members. Stolen prescription pain medications that are sold on the street can kill. Opioids should be stored in a cool and dry place.

#### 10. Dispose of any unused medications

Leftover pain medications make tempting targets for theft. They can also be dangerous if children or pets find them. Many communities offer places for you to drop off unused medications.

- To find a medication disposal site in Michigan visit: <http://michigan-open.org/takebackmap>. Type in your location under the map to find locations to dispose of leftover medication.
- To find locations in all US states visit AwareRxE at: <https://nabp.pharmacy/initiatives/awarxe/drug-disposal-locator/>.

If a take-back program is not available in your area visit

<http://michmed.org/MmA6N> to learn how to dispose of medications.

**It is a felony to deliver, distribute or share a controlled substance without a prescription properly issued by a health care prescriber**

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#### Adapted from:

1. LifeSource: *the 8 Opioid Safety Points for Patients*:  
<http://www.yourlifesource.org/patient-education/eight-steps/>.
2. National Institute on Drug abuse. *Effects of Pain Medicine Abuse on Brains and Bodies*  
<https://easyread.drugabuse.gov/content/effects-pain-medicine-abuse-brains-and-bodies>
3. CDC. *Pregnancy and Opioid Pain Medications*.  
[https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/pregnancy\\_opioid\\_pain\\_factsheet-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/pregnancy_opioid_pain_factsheet-a.pdf)