



# Opioids and Pain in Youth: A toolkit for health professionals

**This toolkit shares evidence-based solutions to help you and your patients.**

Whether safely prescribing opioids, exploring alternative therapies,  
or providing informed education, your efforts matter!

[#ItDoesntHaveToHurt](#)



## Acknowledgements

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# Acute Pain

## Overview

Acute pain often accompanies injury or illness in childhood. When a child or youth has acute pain, their pain should be first managed with physical and psychological strategies, coupled with non-opioid analgesia whenever possible.

For moderate or severe pain, however, the short-term use of opioids may sometimes be necessary. Judicious use of opioids can help reduce children’s discomfort, keep them comfortable during medical examination and diagnostic evaluation, improve their satisfaction with care, and prevent long-term negative consequences of untreated pain.

This toolkit section includes resources for safer and responsible prescribing and administering opioids for acute pain in children and youth.

**When opioids are prescribed and administered for acute pain, there are several considerations to ensure safer therapeutic use:**

- **Physical** (e.g., heat, ice, splinting) and **psychological** (e.g., distraction) treatments should be used for most children and youth with acute pain
- **Non-opioid medications** (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen, other NSAIDs) should be used as first-line pharmacologic therapies
- **Ibuprofen and acetaminophen can be combined for relief of moderate pain;** this combination provides relief similar to many oral opioid medications, without opioid side effects, and may alleviate the need to prescribe opioids
- **Opioids should be combined with a non-opioid medication** to reduce the total amount of opioid needed and lessen the occurrence of adverse events.
- **Three days (or 5-10 doses) of an oral opioid medication** is almost always enough to manage acute injuries at home
- **Children and their families should always be counselled** about the potential side effects of opioid medications
- **Opioid risk assessment should be performed for all families** receiving a prescription for opioids, using a validated risk assessment tool

**Opioids should be prescribed and administered in a culturally safe way.**

**Also consider risks for opioid use disorder, higher-risk opioid use, child age, and pre-existing mental health diagnoses.**

However, even when these risks are present, **children with severe pain have the right to adequate pain management, which may include the use of opioids.** Children and their families should share the decision-making about whether opioid analgesia is appropriate for them with their healthcare provider.

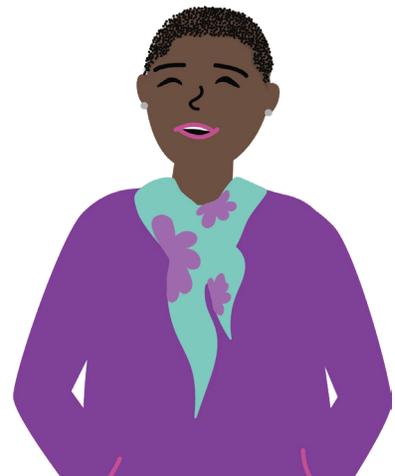
“Opioids have their place and are definitely a very powerful resource in caring for youth with acute and chronic pain. It’s just that there has to be more knowledge, more education for physicians and for patients.”

~ Youth Patient Partner

### Definition of acute pain:

**Pain that is recent in onset and typically self-limiting, with a duration that typically ranges from a few hours to no more than 3 months** (depending on the anticipated duration of the healing process) related to tissue injury, a medical procedure, and/or following surgery, acute illness, trauma, or other injuries. Children can experience acute and chronic pain concurrently.

[CAN/HSO 13200:2023 Pediatric Pain Management Standard. 2023](#)



## Statements and Guidelines

### **Evidence-Based Guidelines for Prehospital Pain Management: Recommendations**

Lindbeck G, et al. Prehospital Emergency Care. 2023

[View recommendations](#)

### **Acute complications in children with sickle cell disease: Prevention and management**

Beck CE, et al. Paediatrics & Child Health. Canadian Paediatric Society. 2022

[View position statement](#)

### **Approaching acute pain in emergency settings; European Society for Emergency Medicine (EUSEM) guidelines—part 2: management and recommendations**

Hachimi-Idrissi S, et al. Internal and Emergency Medicine. 2020

[View recommendations](#)

\*subscription-based access

### **Managing pain and distress in children undergoing brief diagnostic and therapeutic procedures**

Trottier ED, et al. Paediatrics & Child Health. Canadian Paediatric Society. 2019

[View position statement](#)

### **Practice guideline update summary: Acute treatment of migraine in children and adolescents**

Oskoui M, et al. Neurology. 2019

[View practice guideline](#)

### **Opioid prescribing for acute pain: care for people 15 years of age and older**

Health Quality Ontario. 2018

[View PDF](#)

## Review Articles

### **Responsible and safe use of opioids in children and adolescents in the emergency department**

Ali S & Drendel A. Pediatric Emergency Medicine Practice. 2023

[Access article](#) \*subscription-based access

## Health Professional Resources

### **Assessing and Treating Acute Pain in Children with Sickle Cell Disease**

Guidance for emergency department staff, based on a Canadian Paediatric Society Position Statement CHU Sainte-Justine. 2023.

[View PDF](#)

### **Intranasal Fentanyl**

CHU Sainte-Justine. 2020

Guide clinique destiné aux professionnels de la santé sur l'utilisation du fentanyl intranasal lors des interventions médicales

[Visit website](#)

## Youth and Family Resources

### **Analésiques opioïdes à courte action: informations pour les patients et les familles**

CHU Sainte-Justine. 2021

This brochure provides additional information on the use of short-acting opioids to help reduce pain while minimizing associated side effects and risks.

[View PDF](#)

### **Short-acting Opioid Analgesics: information for patients and families**

CHU Sainte-Justine. 2021

This brochure provides additional information on how to use prescription opioids to help reduce pain while minimizing associated side effects and risks.

[View PDF](#)

### **Acute pain: How to treat and manage in infants and toddlers**

About Kids Health. SickKids. 2019

Learn about the 3P approach to pain management for infant and toddler's acute pain.

[Visit website](#) (multiple languages)

### **Acute pain: How to treat and manage in young children**

About Kids Health. SickKids. 2019

Learn about the 3P approach to pain management for children's acute pain.

[Visit website](#) (multiple languages)

### **Acute pain: How to treat and manage in older children**

About Kids Health. SickKids. 2019

Learn about the 3P approach to pain management for older children's pain (age six to 12).

[Visit website](#) (multiple languages)

### **Acute pain: How to treat and manage in teens**

About Kids Health. SickKids. 2019

Learn about the 3P approach to pain management for pain in teens.

[Visit website](#) (multiple languages)

## **Additional Resources**

### **The Effectiveness of Ketamine Compared to Opioid Analgesics for management of acute pain in Children in The Emergency Department: systematic Review**

Alanazi E. American Journal of Emergency Medicine. 2022

[Access article](#)

\*subscription-based access

### **The effectiveness and safety of paediatric prehospital pain management: a systematic review**

Abebe Y, et al. Scandinavian Journal of Trauma, Resuscitation and Emergency Medicine. 2021

[Access article](#)

### **Influence of ketamine versus fentanyl on pain relief for pediatric orthopedic emergencies: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies**

Qui J & Xie M. Medicine. 2021.

[Access article](#)

### **Medications containing low-dose codeine for the treatment of pain and coughs**

CADTH. 2021

[View PDF](#)

### **Oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs versus other oral analgesic agents for acute soft tissue injury**

Jones P, et al. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2020

[Access article](#)

### **Efficacy of ibuprofen in musculoskeletal post-traumatic pain in children: A systematic review**

Parri N & Lazzeri S. PLoS ONE. 2020

[Access article](#)

### **Codeine for Pediatric Patients with Acute Pain: A Review of Clinical Effectiveness**

CADTH. 2019

[View PDF](#)

### **Revisiting established medicines: An overview of systematic reviews about ibuprofen and paracetamol for treating pain in children**

Radman M, et al. European Journal of Pain. 2019

[Access article](#)

### **Treatment of pain with intranasal fentanyl in pediatric patients in an acute care setting: a systematic review**

Setlur A & Friedland H. Pain Management. 2018

[Access article](#) \*subscription-based access

### **How Safe Are Common Analgesics for the Treatment of Acute Pain for Children? A Systematic Review**

Hartling L, et al. Pain and Research Management. 2016

[Access article](#)

### **Intranasal fentanyl for the management of acute pain in children**

Murphy A, et al. Cochrane Database Systematic Reviews. 2014

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