



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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Scan here! For additional information,
tools, and to provide feedback on
the effectiveness of this resource.

linktr.ee/youthinpain





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General Resources

Overview

When a child or youth has pain, their pain should be managed using a multimodal, biopsychosocial approach employing physical, psychological, and pharmacologic modalities.

Pharmacologic therapies should begin with non-opioid analgesia whenever possible. For various types of pain adding opioids may sometimes be necessary – this includes moderate to severe short-term pain, or long-term pain.

This toolkit section includes general resources about managing children's and youths' pain, and general information about opioid safety.

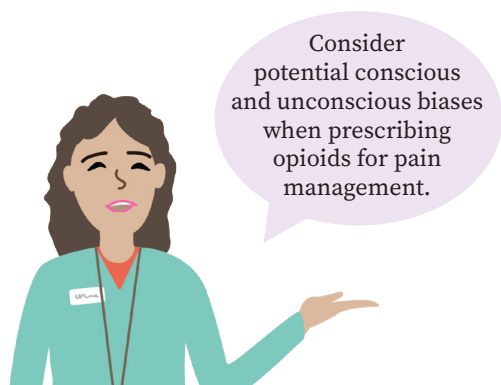
When opioids are prescribed and administered for pain, there are several considerations to ensure safer therapeutic use:

- **Treat pain in a multimodal fashion**, combining physical, psychological, and pharmacologic interventions to create the best pain-relief plan for each child/youth
- **Physical** (e.g., heat, ice, splinting) **and psychological** (e.g., distraction) treatments should be used for most children and youth with acute pain
- **Chronic pain is best managed using combined treatment modalities** (e.g., physiotherapy, occupational therapy), non-opioid medications, and counselling, and infrequently requires opioid use
- **Non-opioid pharmacologic treatments** (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen, other NSAIDs) should be used before or at the same time as opioid options are prescribed
- **When needed, opioid analgesia should be combined with non-opioid pharmacologic medications** to ensure that only the lowest dose of opioids is used
- **Opioid analgesia should be used for as short of a time as possible.** As soon as a child or youth's pain is better managed, they should be transitioned to an alternative non-opioid treatment
- **Children, youth and their families should always be counselled about the potential side effects** of opioid medications when prescribing or administering opioid analgesia
- **Potential for higher-risk opioid use** should be assessed using a validated risk assessment tool before prescribing or administering opioid analgesia
- **Children and youth who are prescribed opioids for a longer term should be educated** about the risks of physical and psychological dependence, as well as withdrawal

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.



“Children’s pain deserves attention and respect. Ignoring and under-treating their pain has important short and long-term effects for both the child’s well-being as well as their ability to get proper healthcare. Dispelling myths and sharing facts through easy-to-use toolkits like this can help make providing better pain care simpler for care providers.”

~ Dr. Samina Ali, Physician

Implicit bias and stigma in healthcare are significant contributors to health inequalities, poor treatment outcomes and avoidance of care.

To ensure equitable access to quality pain management, it is essential to be self-reflective and consider the conscious and unconscious perceptions and attitudes that drive effective and safe opioid prescribing for pain in youth.

There is a need for additional research and resources to address pain- and opioid-related stigma in youth with acute and chronic pain. The following resources contain general information on the role of stigma in the health system. The resources also include recommended ways of communicating about opioid use in compassionate, safe, and non-stigmatizing ways.

Stigma harms patients and considerations are needed for designing and delivering safe and equitable care.

For example, terms such as ‘medical/non-medical substance use’, ‘substance use’, ‘substance use disorder’ (when medically accurate), or ‘higher-risk opioid use’ are alternative non-stigmatizing terms as compared with, ‘substance abuse’, ‘substance misuse’, ‘substance habit’ or ‘recreational substance use.’

Substance Use Spectrum, Health Canada, 2022.

[Visit website](#)

Stigma & Implicit Bias Toolkit, IPRO NQIC, a Network of Quality Improvement and Innovation Contractor for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). 2020.

[View PDF](#)

Addressing Stigma: Towards a More Inclusive Health System – What We Heard Report, Public Health Agency of Canada. 2019

[Visit website](#)

Communicating about Substance Use in Compassionate, Safe and Non-Stigmatizing Ways - A Resource for Canadian Health Professional Organizations and their Membership, Public Health Agency of Canada. 2019.

[Visit website](#)

Stigma and Opioid Use

Substance Use Spectrum

Health Canada, 2022.

[Visit website](#)

Stigma & Implicit Bias Toolkit

IPRO NQIIC, a Network of Quality Improvement and Innovation Contractor for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). 2020.

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Public Health Agency of Canada. 2019

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Public Health Agency of Canada. 2019.

[Visit website](#)

Statements and Guidelines

The Pediatric Pain Management Standard

CAN/HSO 13200:2023 Pediatric Pain Management Standard

Health Standards Organization. 2023

[Access national standard](#)

Best practices in pain assessment and management for children

Trottier ED, et al. Paediatrics & Child Health. Canadian Paediatric Society. 2022

[View position statement](#)

The use of oral opioids to control children's pain in the post-codeine era

Reider MJ & Jong G. Paediatrics & Child Health. Canadian Paediatric Society. 2021

[View position statement](#)

Non-prescription pain relief products containing codeine are not recommended for use in people under 18 years of age

Government of Canada. 2020

[View public statement](#)

Summary Safety Review - Hydrocodone-containing products - Assessing the Risk of Serious Breathing Problems (respiratory depression) in Children and Adolescents

Government of Canada. 2016

[View public statement](#)

Review Articles

Opioid Overdose in the Hospital Setting: A Systematic Review

Danovitch I, et al. Journal of Addiction Medicine. 2020

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

Morphine or hydromorphone: which should be preferred? A systematic review

Spénard S, et al. Archives of Disease in Childhood. 2020

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

Health Professional Resources

Pain treatment bottom line recommendations

Bottom line recommendation for timely and effective multi-modal pain care including pharmacologic treatment for acute pain in pediatric patients.

TREKK and EMSC Innovation and Improvement Centre. 2022

[View PDF](#)

Opioids and Children's Pain

Online infographic that provides information, guidelines, and tools to safely manage opioid prescribing in pediatric patients.

TREKK. 2021

[Visit website](#)

Prevention and Treatment of Opioid and Benzodiazepine Withdrawal

Sample guideline on how to wean pediatric patients off opioids and benzodiazepines who are at risk of developing withdrawal symptoms.

SickKids. 2018

[View PDF](#)

Pediatric Acute Care Opioid Weaning Guidelines UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital.

Summary table outlining general guidelines for opioid weaning in pediatric patients.

ChildKind International. 2018

[Visit website](#)

Youth and Family Resources

What are Opioids?

A resource for caregivers offering information and guidance on navigating the use of prescribed opioids to treat moderate to severe pain in children.

TREKK. 2021

[View website](#)

Opioids don't have to be scary!

A resource for youth offering information and guidance on navigating the use of prescribed opioids to treat moderate to severe pain.

TREKK. 2021

[View website](#)

So you have been prescribed an opioid?

A resource for youth explaining how to safely take prescribed opioid medication, dispelling misconceptions, and tips for communication with healthcare providers.

Reiter E & Ali S. Solutions for Kids in Pain. 2021

[View PDF](#)

Question Opioids: A video series

This is a video series aimed at youth and adults to empower them with important information about starting opioids.

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada. 2017

[Watch videos](#)

Opioids for pain

Learn why opioids such as morphine, fentanyl and codeine are prescribed and how they help manage pain in children.

About Kids Health. SickKids. 2014

[Visit website](#)

Safe opioid checklist for kids

A safety checklist to minimize the risks linked with opioid use.

About Kids Health. SickKids. No Date

[View PDF](#)

Health Canada advises Canadians to exercise caution when taking gabapentin or pregabalin with opioids

Government of Canada. 2019

[View public statement](#)

Patients as the last slice of swiss cheese

He T & Ho C. Hospital News. Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada. 2017

[View PDF](#)

Summary Safety Review - Codeine-containing products - Further Assessing the Risk of Serious Breathing Problems in Children and Adolescents

Government of Canada. 2016

[View public statement](#)

Advancing Opioid Safety for Children in Hospitals

The Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada. 2014

[Visit website](#) (multiple languages)

Recognition and Management of Iatrogenically Induced Opioid Dependence and Withdrawal in Children

Galinken J, et al.. Pediatrics. 2014

[Access article](#)

Premedication for endotracheal intubation in the newborn infant

Barrington KJ. Canadian Paediatric Society. 2011

[View position statement](#)

Opioids BC Children's Hospital.

[View PDF](#)

Weaning Algorithm for Combination Use of Opioids and Benzodiazepines

SickKids. ChildKind International. No Date

[Visit website](#)

Additional Resources

Codeine

Government of Canada. 2023

[Visit website](#)

5 Questions to ask about my medicines

Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada. 2021

[Visit website](#)

Talking to Your Health Care Provider About Opioids (fact sheet)

Government of Canada. 2020

[Visit website](#)

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