



# 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**



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tools, and to provide feedback on  
the effectiveness of this resource.

[linktr.ee/youthinpain](https://linktr.ee/youthinpain)





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# Higher-Risk Opioid Use

## Overview

Almost 15% of families report living with a family member who has a substance use disorder\*, which has implications for the management of children's pain.

\*Jun et al. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxz162>  
Hadland et al. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.15487>

Screening children and their families for higher-risk opioid use and opioid use disorder (OUD) prior to prescribing opioids can help identify at-risk families for treatment referral and improve safety counselling regarding medication use at home. Further, prescribing or providing a take-home naloxone kit provides an opportunity to discuss harm reduction with families and children/youth who may be at risk for adverse outcomes such as overdose.

This toolkit section includes resources about screening for and treating higher-risk opioid use in children and youth and OUD risk assessment.

### Recommendations for screening or treating children and youth for higher-risk opioid use or opioid use disorder (OUD) include:

- **Take time to provide thorough discharge instructions and education** when sending a family home with a prescription for therapeutic opioids; this includes safe storage, side effects, and safe disposal
- When treating a child/youth who reveals a personal or family history of higher risk opioid use or an opioid use disorder, **consider providing or prescribing a naloxone take-home kit**
- When dispensing opioids for a child/youth (or their caregiver) who has an OUD, **risk-mitigating options** include pharmacy dispensing of partial prescriptions, involvement of another caregiver for dispensing of medications, and closer follow-up for signs of higher risk use
- **All children and youth should be screened for OUD** and other substance use disorders, using a validated tool such as [S2BI](#) or [BSTAD](#)
- When treating an OUD in a child/youth, the healthcare provider should **consult and/or refer to a substance use disorder specialist/team** with experience treating youth with OUD
- **Treatment plans for youth with OUD should be developmentally-appropriate**, youth centered, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, confidential, promote recovery, and include family involvement when appropriate
- **When treating an OUD, the full range of available treatments should be considered** including pharmacologic treatments, non-pharmacologic interventions, and recovery-oriented services, with buprenorphine/naloxone recommended as first line treatment for moderate/severe opioid use disorder
- **Transitioning to methadone should be considered** in youth who do not respond to adequately dosed buprenorphine/naloxone

**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 chronic 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.

### Definitions:

**Higher-risk use:** is use that has a harmful and negative impact to a person, their family, friends and others

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/publications/substance-use-spectrum-infographic/pub-eng.pdf>

**Opioid use disorder (OUD):** Misuse or use of prescription opioids (e.g. oxycodone, hydrocodone) and/or use of illegal opioids (e.g. heroin, carfentanil) resulting in significant impairment or distress; a DSM-5 diagnostic code. Opioid use disorder also includes the terms “opioid addiction”, “opioid abuse”, and “opioid dependence”.

Groenewald, CB. 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6782052/>

“I would like to see prescribers pay as much attention to the pain kids have as they do to the potential complications of opioids. Families and patients need to be involved in weighing the risks and benefits of whether these medications should be taken, as opposed to being made to feel we are bad for trying to get medication that works.”

~ Natalie, Parent Partner



## Statements and Guidelines

### Prescription Opioids

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. Canadian Drug Summary. 2022

[View summary](#)

### CAEP Position Statement: Emergency department management of people with opioid use disorder

Koh J, et al. Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine. 2020

[View position statement](#)

### Treatment of opioid use disorder for youth: Guideline supplement.

British Columbia Centre on Substance Use. 2018

[View guideline](#)

### Medication-Assisted Treatment of Adolescents With Opioid Use Disorders

Committee on Substance Use and Prevention. Pediatrics. 2016

[View policy statement](#)

### Pain Management in Patients With Substance Use Disorders

Oliver J, et al. Journal of Addiction Nursing. 2012

[View practice guidelines](#)

### Nonmedical Opioid Use After Short-term Therapeutic Exposure in Children: A Systematic Review

Ahrari M, et al. Pediatrics. 2021

[Access article](#)

### Opioid use and misuse in children, adolescents, and young adults with cancer: a systematic review of the literature

Beauchemin M, et al. Supportive Care in Cancer. 2021

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

## Risk Assessment Tools

### Screening Tools for Adolescent Substance Use

National Institute on Drug Abuse, Advancing Addiction Science. 2019

This website includes two online screening tools that providers can use to assess for substance use disorder risk among adolescents. These tools help providers quickly and easily introduce brief, evidence-based screenings into their clinical practices. This includes the Brief Screener for Tobacco, Alcohol, and other Drugs (BSTAD) and the Screening to Brief Interventions (S2BI) tools.

[Visit website](#)

[Access online BSTAD tool](#)

[Access online S2BI tool](#)

### CRAFT Tool

Center for Adolescent Behavioral Health Research (CABHRe). 2020

The CRAFT is an efficient and effective health screening tool designed to identify substance use, substance-related riding/driving risk, and substance use disorder among youth ages 12-21.

[Visit website](#) (multiple languages)

## Review Articles

### Quantifying unused opioids following emergency and ambulatory care: A systematic review and meta-analysis

Dyson MP, et al. Journal of the American College of Emergency Physicians Open. 2022

[Access article](#)

### Interventions to Reduce Opioid Use in Youth At-Risk and in Treatment for Substance Use Disorders: A Scoping Review

Narin SA, et al. Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. 2022

[Access article](#)

## Youth and Family Resources

### **Parents like us. The Unofficial Survival Guide to Parenting a Young Person with a Substance Use Disorder**

Foundry BC. 2021

This handbook is written by parents for parents, to let other parents know they are not alone. It includes information on the science of addiction, signs of problematic substance use, harm reduction strategies, and resources for staying connected, caring for yourself, and navigating the system.

[View PDF](#)

### **Opioids: what you and your friends need to know**

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. 2020

This resource is geared towards teens and answers common questions about prescription opioid use, danger signs of an opioid problem, and information on getting help if there are concerns about the safe use of prescription opioids.

[View PDF](#)

### **Let's talk opioids, including fentanyl. A parent's guide to understanding opioid use by youth**

Drug free kids Canada. 2020

This guide answers parents' questions about opioids and what to know about the risks associated with their use

[View PDF](#)

### **Need help? Know that you are not alone. Parents' support hub**

Drug free kids Canada. 2023

The Parent Support Hub is safe virtual space for parents, guardians and families to get guidance and support. It is a free service available 24/7 for anyone who is concerned about the use of substances by a young person in their life.

[Visit website](#)

## Additional Resources

### **Opioid agonist treatment for people who are dependent on pharmaceutical opioids**

Nielsen S, et al. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2022

[Access article](#)

### **Risk Factors for Drug Overdose in Young People: A Systematic Review of the Literature**

Lyons RM, et al. Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology. 2019

[Access article](#)

### **Detoxification treatments for opiate dependent adolescents**

Minozzi S, et al. Cochrane Database Systematic Review. 2014

[Access article](#)



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