

Safe prescribing of opioids for pain management in children and adolescents: Tips for healthcare providers

Key considerations before prescribing opioids for pain management

- Consider nonopioid options for pain.
- Ensure family members have the necessary information on safe and responsible prescription opioid use.
- Educate families about the dangers of opioid misuse.
- Share a pain management plan
- Provide contact information to ensure easy access for any questions or concerns.

Why Opioids Should be Prescribed with Caution to Children and Adolescents

Legitimate use of opioids among adolescents is correlated with a 33% increase in the risk of future non-medical opioid use when reaching young adulthood.

As of 2015, past year and lifetime rates of opioid misuse among adolescents were 3.9% and 7.8%, respectively. This rate was much higher (20.1%) in young adults 18 to 29 years of age.

Past month misuse of opioids was reported in 276,000 adolescents, and past year misuse was reported by 17.2% of adolescents who use prescription drugs medically or non-medically in the previous year.

Non-medical use of opioids is strongly associated with heroin initiation.

Deaths involving heroin among adolescents aged 15 to 19 years increased during the 1999–2015 period and was 3 times higher in 2015 (1.0 per 100,000) than in 1999 (0.3 per 100,000).

Medication strategies in clinical practice and in the home are essential to curb these trends.



Considering Non-Opioid Options

- Are opioids appropriate and necessary for pain management in this instance?
- Can nonopioid medications be used with the same effectiveness?
- Are other pain treatment options that don't include opioids (physical, occupational, behavioral therapies) possible or recommended?
- If opioids are indicated, what is the least amount of opioids needed for acute pain?

Teach Safe Opioid Pain Management

The following points should be covered with caregiver/child to ensure safe opioid use:

- Opioids should only be given to the person they were prescribed for.
- Give the child opioids only for the reason they were ordered.
- Do not give the child any more opioids than indicated. Less can always be given if other ways of relieving pain work (like Tylenol or ibuprofen).
- Keep a medicine log. Tell you how the child is doing with their pain and how the medicines are helping.
- Store opioids in a locked cabinet away from children, relatives, and visitors.
- Keep track of how much medicine is in the container. This way, caregiver(s) know if someone else is taking the medicine.
- Safely get rid of any leftover opioids as soon as the child no longer needs them.

Cover Risks of Opioid Misuse

Review common side effects that are not usually dangerous when directions for taking opioids are followed.

If the child has to be on opioids for a longer than several days or so, discuss other risks, including:

- Tolerance (needing more opioid for the same pain relief)
- Physical dependence (having flu-like symptoms when the child stops taking the opioid)
- Addiction (when someone craves the medicine so much that they keep taking it even when it hurts their health, relationships, or money). A child or adult addicted to opioids may:
 - Want to get more when the prescription runs out (they may even lie to a doctor to get more)
 - Do inappropriate or risky things they would not normally do (such as buy and use street drugs)
 - Try to get opioids from a friend or family member
 - Steal opioids



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Provide a Pain Management Plan

- ❑ **Indicate timing** and **dosage** of pain medications as well as estimated **duration** of need
- ❑ **Encourage tracking** when and how much opioid medication is given
- ❑ Suggest when and what types of **nonopioid options** can be used instead
- ❑ Highlight any **potential interactions with** the child's **other current medication** to watch for
- ❑ Reinforce with parents never to give their child any more opioids than prescribed and how to use nonopioid medicines to help with pain.
- ❑ Encourage caregivers to inform you of their child's status and how the medicines are helping.
- ❑ Instruct caregivers **to call 911** when they observe the following signs that could mean a child is having a serious allergic reaction or an overdose:
 - Starts wheezing
 - Has trouble breathing
 - Has difficulty swallowing
 - Cannot be woken up after taking medicine
- ❑ Ensure family members have your number to call if a side effect is causing the child problems.
- ❑ Provide the website to locate the nearest local drug take-back site for unused medication
<https://www.artakeback.org>.

Healthcare Provider Resources

American Academy of Family Physicians Pain Management Toolkit. Accessed 9/12/19 at <https://www.aafp.org/patient-care/public-health/pain-opioids/cpm-toolkit.html>

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons Pain Relief Toolkit. Accessed 9/12/19 at <https://aaos.org/PainReliefToolkit/?ssopc=1>

Hauer J, Jones BL. (2019) Evaluation and management of pain in children. Up to Date, accessed 9/12/19 at <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/evaluation-and-management-of-pain-in-children>

Pain Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force. (2019) Draft Report on Pain Management Best Practices: Updates, Gaps, Inconsistencies, and Recommendations. Accessed 9/12/19 at <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/advisory-committees/pain/reports/2018-12-draft-report-on-updates-gaps-inconsistencies-recommendations/index.html#top>

Pediatric Pain Management Toolkit. Accessed 9/12/19 at <https://emscimprovement.center/education-and-resources/toolkits/pediatric-pain-management-toolkit/>

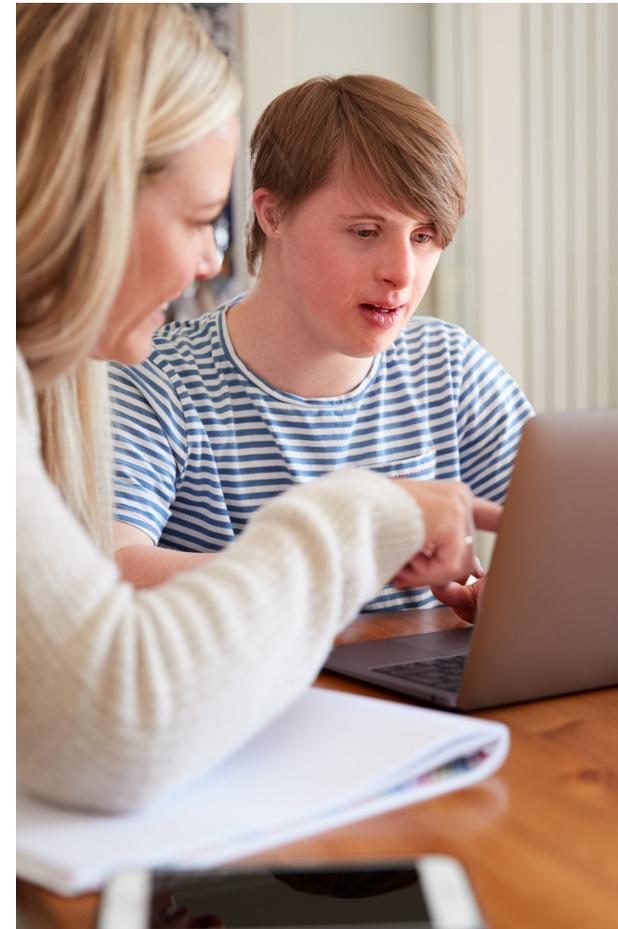
Policy on Acute Pediatric Dental Pain Management. Accessed 9/12/19 at https://www.aapd.org/globalassets/media/policies_guidelines/p_acutepainmgmt.pdf

Caregiver Resources

Be MedWise Program at NeedyMeds. Use Pain Meds Safely. <https://bemedwise.org/medication-safety/pain-management-medications>

National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2019) Prescription Opioids. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-opioids>

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Miech R, Johnston L, O'Malley PM, et al. Prescription opioids in adolescence and future opioid misuse. Pediatrics. 2015;136(5):e1169-e1177. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2016 Sep; <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FFR2-2015/NSDUHFFR2-2015.htm> Accessed January 19, 2019.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Talking to your kids about prescription drug abuse. <http://www.bemedwise.org/docs/samhsatalkingtoyourkids.pdf> Accessed January 19, 2019.

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