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KNOW! the Facts about Opioids and Opioid Misuse



What are opioids?

Opioids are a class of drugs used to relieve pain. This class of drugs includes fentanyl, heroin, and prescription opioids. Common prescription opioids include oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine, and methadone.

In addition to relieving pain, opioids can also create a sense of euphoria, which likely contributes to opioid misuse and opioid

"Opiates" vs. "Opioids"

Although these terms are often used interchangeably they are different:

Opiates refer to natural opioids such as heroin,

use disorder. Over time, opioid misuse can lead to insomnia, muscle pain, heart problems, pneumonia, and addiction.^{1,2}

morphine and codeine.

Opioids refer to all natural, semisynthetic, and synthetic opioids.

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid and a major contributor to overdoses in Ohio and the United States. There are two types of fentanyl: pharmaceutical fentanyl, which is prescribed by doctors, and illicitly manufactured fentanyl, which is often added to other drugs, like cocaine, psychostimulants (i.e., methamphetamines), benzodiazepines (i.e., Valium, Xanax), stimulants (i.e., Adderall, Ritalin), prescription opioids, and heroin.

Fentanyl makes drugs cheaper, more addictive, and more dangerous. Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, which means that even in small doses, fentanyl can be deadly. Counterfeit pills that have been laced with fentanyl can look extremely similar to drugs that do not contain fentanyl. You cannot see, taste, or smell fentanyl -- the only way to tell if drugs have been laced with fentanyl is by using fentanyl test strips.^{1,3}

What is heroin?

Heroin is an illegal opioid that produces similar pain relieving and euphoric effects to prescription opioids. Like prescription opioids and fentanyl, heroin is addictive and can result in an overdose. In some places, heroin is cheaper and easier to access than prescription opioids. Some people who misuse heroin have also misused prescription opioids.²

What is opioid misuse?

When taken as prescribed by a doctor and for a short period of time, prescription opioids can be safe for most people. However, opioids can also be misused.

Common Ways Opioids Are Misused

Taking opioids for a long period of time

- Taking opioids in a larger quantity than prescribed
- Administering opioids in a way other than prescribed (i.e., snorting or injecting)
- Using opioids not for pain relief, but to get high
- Taking opioids without a prescription
- Taking opioids that were prescribed to someone else
- Using opioids with other drugs and/or alcohol¹

Why might young people misuse opioids?

The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids accurately highlights that "drug use doesn't happen in a vacuum — it addresses a need, whether it's to fit in socially, escape problems, help with sleep, tackle boredom, for thrill-seeking and more." Substances, including opioids, are often used to cope with stress, emotional and psychological pain, and difficult life transitions. Opioid misuse among teens can also begin with a legitimate prescription for physical pain relief.¹

More than 95% of youth do not misuse opioids. In fact, teen use of illicit drugs has been relatively stable or declining over the past few years. However, there has been a dramatic increase in overdoses among young people, most likely due to the presence of fentanyl within the drug supply. Opioid misuse is more dangerous than ever. It is important to know what you can do to prevent opioid misuse among the young people in your life.⁴

How can caring adults prevent opioid misuse?

Engaging in meaningful, ongoing conversations about drug use and taking preventive action are some of the best things you can do to safeguard your teen's health.²

Know your influence

Strong, open relationships between trusted caring adults and young people are among the most influential factors for young people as they are growing up. Know that your perspective on drugs and alcohol makes an impact, even if it doesn't seem like it. Communicate why you do

not want them misusing prescribed medications, taking anyone else's medications, or purchasing illicit drugs.^{1,5}

Ask open-ended questions

Ask questions to get your teen thinking about the potential negative consequences of misusing opioids and the positive consequences of not using opioids and other drugs. Practice active listening by reflecting back on what you hear from your young person and using I statements to express your perspective.¹

Share stories

Stories from people struggling with opioid use, people in recovery, or those who have lost loved ones due to overdose can have a powerful impact. If you see or hear a story about opioid use in the news, talk about it. Ask your young person for their thoughts and feelings about these stories.¹

Offer empathy

Adolescence can be difficult. Show your young person that you understand that they may be struggling and offer your support. Emphasize how important their health and happiness are to you. Remind them that while everyone has their own struggles, substances are never a healthy way to cope with problems.¹

Avoid scare tactics

While it may be tempting to focus solely on the dangerous aspects of drug use, remember that scare tactics are ineffective. Instead, focus on how much you care for your young person and providing them the information they need to make safe choices. The young people that are the most at risk for opioid misuse may not listen if they feel judged or shamed.⁶

Explain the reality

Keep yourself and your young person informed of the facts. About 75% of drug overdose deaths in Ohio in 2020 involved an opioid. More than 80% of opioid-involved deaths were due to fentanyl.⁷ Fentanyl and opioid misuse cause real harm to Ohio communities. Substances can be laced with fentanyl before they reach your community and fentanyl can be anywhere. While one pill might not be deadly, another one could be.⁶

Seek non-opioid alternatives for pain relief

If your young person gets injured or undergoes surgery, they may be prescribed an opioid painkiller. Don't be afraid to communicate your concerns about opioids and ask your doctor about alternative painkillers, like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), acetaminophen, and local anesthetics.¹

Practice safe medicine storage

You may not be able to avoid receiving a prescription for opioids. However, two-thirds of teens who report misusing prescription drugs get them from friends and family, often taking them directly from household medicine cabinets. To help prevent opioid misuse when there are opioids in your home, follow three simple steps: [know, secure, and dispose](#) of your medications.^{1,8}

Create an exit plan

Work with your young person to create a plan in case they are offered prescription opioids or other drugs. Maybe they text a code word that signals they would like to be picked up or you work together to create an excuse to use at any time. Peer pressure can be a strong force, so having a plan for what to do in these situations will empower your young person to make safe choices.⁵

Carry naloxone

While the goal is to prevent teens from using opioids and other drugs, we know that opioid misuse still occurs among young people. Naloxone is a medication that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose. Carrying naloxone and knowing when and how to use it can save lives. Teach your young person about how to administer naloxone, emphasize the importance of calling 911 after administering naloxone, and remind your teen of [Ohio's Good Samaritan Law](#). You can find naloxone in Ohio through the [Project DAWN](#) dashboard.⁹

Resources

For more information:

[Fentanyl Fact Sheet](#)

[Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medication](#)

[Heroin, Fentanyl, and Other Opioids](#)

[Youth Discussion Guide](#)

Naloxone:

[Project DAWN](#)

[Administering Narcan](#)

[Naloxone - OMHAS](#)

Treatment and Recovery:

[Opioids: Facts Parents Need to Know](#)

[Recovery is Possible](#)

[Talking with your teen about opioids](#)

[Find Treatment](#)

Safe Medication Storage:

[Know, secure, dispose](#)

[Securing and Disposing Medications](#)

Sources

1. [Heroin, Fentanyl, and Other Opioids](#)
2. [Opioids: Facts Parents Need to Know](#)
3. [Fentanyl Facts](#)
4. [Most reported substance use among adolescents held steady in 2022](#)
5. [Talking with your teen about opioids](#)
6. [Youth Discussion Guide](#)
7. [Ohio Overdose Investment Snapshot](#)
8. [Know, secure, dispose](#)
9. [OH Against OD](#)

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