



Safety Topic: Opioid Epidemic

How many of you have personally been prescribed pain medication? Know of a family member, friend, or co-worker using or have used prescription pain medication? How many people do you know who have or you have become addicted to prescription pain medication? How many of you have leftover prescriptions in your home?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 115 Americans die every day after overdosing on opioids.

There are two categories of opioids: prescription and illegal. Examples of prescription opioids are: hydrocodone (Vicodin), oxycodone (Percocet, Oxycontin), codeine and morphine. Heroin is an example of an illegal opioid.

The opioid epidemic is becoming a public health crisis with disturbing consequences. The misuse of prescription pain relievers not only affects the life of the user, but also their families, friends, co-workers, and employers. According to NIDA, the crisis of prescription opioid misuse alone is costing the United States roughly \$78 billion a year, including costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.

NIDA estimates that:

- 21-29% of patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain misuse them.
- 8-12% develop an opioid use disorder.
- About 80% of people who use heroin first misused prescription opioids.
- In the Midwest region alone, opioid overdoses increased 70% from July 2016 through September 2017.

Signs and symptoms of someone misusing opioids may include:

- Noticeable elation/euphoria
- Marked sedation/drowsiness
- Confusion
- Constricted pupils
- Slowed breathing
- Intermittent nodding off or loss of consciousness
- Constipation

Other signs of misuse:

- Doctor shopping (getting multiple prescriptions from different doctors)
- Shifting or dramatically changing moods
- Extra pill bottles turning up in the trash
- Social withdrawal/isolation
- Sudden financial problems

Withdrawal symptoms can mimic flu symptoms. If the following are present with any other signs and symptoms, the person may need additional help.

- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Sweating
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Inability to sleep

What can you do to help?

- Speak up. If you notice a loved one, friend, or co-worker struggling with addiction, say something and help them find the appropriate assistance and care.
- Reach out to your employer for assistance. Most employers have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that offers various services to help employees with whatever issues they are facing.
- Don't be afraid to have a conversation with your medical provider. Tell your doctor that you do not want to be prescribed opioids and would rather use a safe combination of over-the-counter medications.
- Safely dispose of old, unused prescription medications. Find a drug take-back program in your area. If there isn't one, check the FDA flush list at fda.gov to determine whether you should throw the drugs in the trash or flush them.
- Keep any medication in a safe location that children cannot access.
- Be careful where you store your medications when you are at work. There have been cases of prescription medications being stolen from lunch boxes, vehicles, lockers, etc.