

# Information for paediatric patients, and their carers, given opioids for short-term treatment of acute pain

This information is intended as a general guide only. It is intended for patients being treated with opioids (eg oxycodone, morphine) for short-term acute pain which most commonly occurs after surgery, as a result of injury or due to an acute medical illness. Please ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you have any questions about the information below.

## Why has your child been given opioids?

Opioids are used to treat moderate to severe pain when other medicines such as paracetamol (for example Panadol<sup>®</sup>, Dymadon<sup>®</sup>) or anti-inflammatory medicines such as ibuprofen (for example Nurofen<sup>®</sup>) or diclofenac (for example Voltaren<sup>®</sup>) are not effective enough by themselves. **Opioids are safe to use in children under medical supervision.**

Your child has been given opioids because they may have pain at home which needs strong pain relief. We would not expect this pain to last more than a few days. Pain normally gets a little better each day as your child recovers and as their body heals they will need less opioid. If, after getting better, the pain returns or gets worse, this may be a sign of a problem. If this occurs you should contact your child's doctor.

## How do I know if my child is in pain?

It is not always easy for parents of young children, or those unable to speak, to work out if their child is in pain. Some young children may respond to the change in routine from a hospital stay by being clingy or reverting back to younger behaviour for a few days. They may need extra attention and comfort.

Signs that your child may need pain medicine include crying, grizzling, not wanting to move or disturbed sleep. If children have had mouth or throat surgery, not wanting to swallow also shows the need for pain medicine.

## How and when should your child be given opioids?

Make sure that you only give opioids as prescribed. You should follow the instructions on the label. If you have also been advised to give paracetamol and anti-inflammatories, these should be given as directed with the opioid to manage the pain.

## **Opioids, if needed, are not recommended for long term use.**

We advise that:

- > you do not give opioids for longer than a week unless advised to do so
- > if your child continues to have moderate to severe pain they should see their doctor.

## Before giving opioids

Before giving opioids tell your doctor or pharmacist if your child:

- > has had an allergic reaction to, or side effects from, an opioid in the past,
- > has allergies to any other medicines
- > has any other medical conditions
- > is taking any other medicines, especially those for pain, anxiety, sleep or depression.

## Precautions

Opioids can cause drowsiness. For your child's safety, we recommend that you follow the instructions listed below for as long as they are taking opioids:

- > **do not** allow your child to ride a bike, swim, operate machinery, including power tools, or drive (if they are old enough to)
- > **do not** give your child other medications which cause drowsiness without checking with your child's doctor or pharmacist first
- > **do not** give more medicine than has been prescribed
- > if your child becomes drowsy or sleepy after taking opioids, **do not** give any more until they are wide awake.

Stop giving opioids and contact the emergency department of your nearest hospital if your child is very sleepy or having trouble staying awake when they normally would be.

## Side effects

Tell your child's doctor or pharmacist if they develop side effects from opioids or if they feel unwell for any reason.

Side effects may include:

- > drowsiness (see precautions above)
- > nausea or vomiting
- > constipation - keep up your child's fluid and fibre intake and keep them active where possible. They may need a laxative. Discuss this with your child's doctor or pharmacist if constipation becomes a problem.
- > skin rash.

## Safety measures

Always make sure that you:

- > tell your child's doctor, dentist and pharmacist that they are taking opioids when you see them
- > ask your child's doctor or pharmacist if they can take their other medicines as well as opioids
- > **do not** give your child's opioids to anyone else
- > **keep your child's opioids in a safe place** and out of reach of others, especially children
- > keep opioids in a cool, dry place
- > take any leftover opioids that are no longer needed, to your local pharmacy for safe disposal.

**This information does not take the place of talking to your child's doctor or pharmacist**

This is a general summary guide only, more detailed consumer medicine information is available from your pharmacist. If you have any other questions about your child's treatment please ask your doctor and/or pharmacist.

Information courtesy of SA Pharmacy, Women's and Children's Hospital.

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## For more information

Contact your healthcare provider.

**In case of overdose or poisoning, contact the Poison Information Centre on telephone 131 126.**

Website: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)

If you require this information in an alternative format please contact SA Health and they will make every effort to assist you.

v 1.4 April 2016

Next review: October 2020

Public – I1 – A1