

# Pediatric Pain Management

Summary of opioid-related guidance for organizational leaders and health professionals from the Pediatric Pain Management national health standard (CAN/HSO 13200:2023)

## Why consider opioids for pain management in children?

- Access to quality, equitable pain management is a fundamental human right, but many children in Canada still experience preventable, untreated, and unmanaged pain.
- Poorly managed pain is costly, with negative short- and long-term consequences on the physical and socioemotional well-being of children and their families.
- Integrating quality, equitable pain care into all relevant child health policies and strategies is essential to support patients, their families, and health professionals.
- Even when indicated or appropriate, opioids are often withheld from youth due to stigma, fears about higher-risk use, or opioid use disorder.

## What is the Pediatric Pain Management health standard?

- Co-developed by Solutions for Kids in Pain (SKIP) and the Health Standards Organization (HSO), this is the **first national standard to guide policies and practice for managing pediatric pain in Canada** (CAN/HSO 13200:2023).
- Considered a National Standard of Canada, the standard guides the delivery of quality pain management for children, outlining **34 specific criteria with accompanying guidelines** detailing how organizational leaders and health care teams can deliver equitable, evidence-informed, and person-centered pain care for children beginning at birth.
- The standard **applies to all hospital settings that provide inpatient, procedural, and/or outpatient services in children's, community/regional, and rehabilitation hospitals**. It is intended for use by organizational leaders and dedicated health care teams providing care to infants, children, and adolescents (birth to 19 years less one day) and their families.
- The standard focuses on how organizational leaders and dedicated health care teams should provide pain care based on the needs, goals, abilities, and preferences of children and their families. It recognizes that children and families are equal members of the health care team, and actively involved in discussions and decision-making about their pain care.

## How does the standard guide safe, effective, and equitable use of opioids for pain in children?

- The standard recognizes that opioids can help to manage moderate-to-severe pain in children and that they are **safe and effective when used correctly**.
- However, the standard indicates that **opioids should not be the first choice for pain relief in children**, but that they can be considered when other pain management strategies like physical therapy or non-opioid medications are not enough.

### The standard guides that...

...organizations establish policies for quality pain management practices that promote **multimodal pain management approaches** (psychosocial, physical, and pharmacological strategies), including when opioids are used.

...opioids should never be withheld in situations where they are clinically indicated.

...**healthcare teams should be mindful of biases** when prescribing opioids, such as those related to race, gender, and/or socioeconomic status. This is especially important when assessing patients for potential for higher-risk opioid use or opioid use disorder.

The standard mandates that organizations prioritize education and training of healthcare teams to ensure competency in pediatric pain management. This includes safe practices for prescribing and managing opioids, as well as the recognition of risk factors for higher-risk use and addiction.

### What should be included in the trainings on safe practices when managing and/or prescribing opioids for pediatric pain management?

- How to appropriately prescribe, monitor, taper, and discontinue opioids;
- How to recognize and seek support for children and families with risk factors for higher-risk use and/or opioid use disorder.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SAFE OPIOID USE

### Acute pain management

- Use the lowest effective opioid dose for the shortest necessary time.
- Consider long-term opioid use risk and tolerance for regular users when prescribing for acute pain.
- Plan for safe discontinuation, storage, disposal, and tapering.

### Chronic pain management

- Establish pain management goals with the child and family.
- Base ongoing opioid therapy on pain mechanism and appropriateness.
- Avoid mandatory deprescribing; involve shared decision-making.
- Designate a single prescriber, conduct regular follow-ups, and maintain communication and records.



### Scan Here

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[linktr.ee/hsostandard.resources](https://linktr.ee/hsostandard.resources)

## The standard emphasizes the importance of identifying and addressing risk factors associated with higher-risk opioid use and/or opioid use disorder.

- Currently, no single screening test can fully identify all risk factors, with many assessing past opioid use and lacking predictive accuracy for future higher-risk use.
- Healthcare professionals must rely on their clinical judgement when identifying these risks and risk factors.

## The standard emphasizes the importance of individualized pain care plans. These care plans and education from healthcare teams about opioids should include:

- ✓ Potential side effects the child may experience with their opioid medications, and how to best manage these
- ✓ Signs of overdose and oversedation
- ✓ Safe storage and disposal
- ✓ Resources and instructions for how to safely dispose of unused medications
- ✓ Safe administration, tapering, and discontinuation
- ✓ Potential benefits and harms of opioids as a co-therapy

## When prescribing opioids to a child with risk factors for higher-risk use or opioid use disorder, additional supports should be provided:

- Coordinate care with other healthcare professionals and incorporate psychosocial support.
- Adjust prescribing schedules for optimal benefit and minimal harm, monitored by the prescriber.
- Consider naloxone co-prescription for chronic pain, educating on its use as a harm reduction measure.
- Document individualized care plans for communication, smooth transitions, and evaluating pain management impact.