



Combating the Opioid Crisis: Schools, Students and Families

In October 2017, President Donald J. Trump declared the opioid crisis a national public health emergency. The U.S. Department of Education (the Department) is joining other federal agencies in combating the opioid crisis that is killing Americans at unprecedented rates and plaguing families and communities. While the causes of opioid misuse are complex and determined by multiple factors, the goals of prevention and recovery focus on reducing risk and promoting factors that increase resiliency against use. Schools play an important role in reaching these goals.

The Department is taking a two-pronged approach to addressing the opioid crisis: 1) helping to educate students, families and educators about the dangers of opioid misuse and about ways to prevent and overcome opioid addiction; and 2) supporting state and local education agencies' efforts to prevent and reduce opioid misuse.



What are opioids, how are they having an impact and what is the federal government doing?

- Opioids are natural or synthetic chemicals that reduce feelings of pain.
- Opioids are a class of drugs that include pain relievers available legally by prescription such as oxycodone, hydrocodone (Vicodin), codeine and morphine, as well as heroin and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl.
- Anyone who takes prescription opioids can become addicted to them or develop tolerance of physical dependence.
- In 2016, more Americans died due to opioid overdoses than car crashes. From cities and suburbs to rural America, opioid addiction and overdose is "the crisis next door."

Resources

- Watch this [recorded webinar](#) to learn more about how the opioid crisis affects students and families, and the policies and practices that can help address the crisis in schools.
- [Opioids.gov](#) illustrates the magnitude of the opioid crisis and actions the Trump administration is taking to address it.
- Data on youth drug use is available at the [National Institute on Drug Abuse's Opioid page](#).
- [Centers for Disease Control's \(CDC\) Opioid Overdose page](#) provides comprehensive information about opioids and their risks, as well as information about how to protect against opioid misuse, addiction and overdose.





What is the role of schools?

- School leaders, teachers and staff can create safe environments and positive cultures for students.
- They can educate students, each other and families about the dangers of drug use and about how to prevent opioid misuse and addiction.
- Many evidence-based prevention programs can be delivered in a school setting.
- Schools can help to mitigate risk factors that can make students vulnerable to engaging in dangerous behavior.
- They can also boost protective factors and increase student engagement.
- Schools can be prepared if an opioid overdose occurs on school grounds.
- Schools and school districts can support students in recovery and students whose family members are suffering from addiction.

Resources

- **Operation Prevention** educates students about the impact of opioids and encourages conversations in the home and classroom.
- **Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction** discusses why adolescence is a critical time for preventing drug addiction.
- Get a **free opioid overdose prevention tool kit**.
- Find information about **recovery high schools**, which support optimum performance and empower access to student recovery.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides an **evidence-based practices resource center**.



What should students know and do?

- The social behavior of students affects the success of schools as learning environments.
- Risk-related behaviors are a barrier to academic gains and healthy lifestyles.
- Students should know about the dangers of opioid misuse and illicit drug use.
- They should be supported in developing decision-making skills and an understanding about ways to resist pressure to experiment with and misuse drugs.
- They should know when and where to seek help either for their own opioid use disorders or addiction issues, or for dealing with issues arising from misuse, addiction and overdose by friends or family members.

Resources

- Learn how drug use **affects the brains of teens**.
- Students can **get the facts about drugs**.
- Confidentially and anonymously **find information on treatment facilities** in the United States and U.S territories for substance misuse, addiction or mental health support.
- **Share your story** about how you overcame addiction, volunteered at a recovery center or worked as a family to help a loved one through recovery.





How can parents and guardians of students help?

- Educated and empowered parents and guardians are the first line of defense in preventing opioid misuse and illicit drug use by students.
- The Department of Education partnered with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to release a new version of the popular publication *Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention*. It provides an overview of opioid misuse as a student issue and profiles of youths who have died from overdoses and those who are actively engaged in preventing drug misuse in their schools and communities. It also contains numerous resources of interest to parents, students and educators.
- Schools and school districts can support students in recovery and students whose family members are suffering from addiction.

Resources

- **Get Smart About Drugs** is a DEA resource for parents, educators and caregivers.
- Parents and educators, **learn how to talk with kids** about the impact of drug use on health.
- Find useful information about **substance abuse prevention** at youth.gov.



Does the Department have funding and other assistance available to help schools address the opioid crisis?

- The Department has a long history of promoting substance misuse prevention in schools through programs, products and targeted technical assistance.
- The Department's Office of Safe and Healthy Students administers grant programs and other technical assistance centers that can help state and local education agencies and schools address opioid misuse prevention, promote school safety and create supportive school climates.

Resources

- **The Office of Safe and Healthy Students** is committed to serving states and school communities by providing resources, direct support and technical assistance on topics that affect the well-being, health and safety of our nation's young people.

Note: The online version of this document contains hypertext links to additional information and resources. If you are reviewing hard copy, please visit www.opioids.gov for access to this additional information. This webpage contains resources that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject-matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

