

Opioid Basics

Opioids are a class of drugs that can be used to reduce pain. Opioids can be an illegal substance, such as heroin, or a legally, prescribed opioid pain reliever, such as hydrocodone (Vicodin). In 2016, 785 Hoosier deaths specifically mentioned involving an opioid as a contributing factor. Opioids can be beneficial when appropriately used for moderate to severe chronic pain, but nonprescription use of opioids can lead to adverse side effects and even death. It is important for patients and providers to discuss treatment options and carefully consider all of the risks and benefits before use.

Opioid drugs include, but are not limited to, those listed below:

Prescription Opioids



Prescription Opioids can be prescribed by doctors to treat moderate to severe pain, but can have serious risks and side effects if not administered and obtained appropriately. Common types are oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine and methadone.

Fentanyl



Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever. It is many times more powerful than other opioids and is approved for treating severe pain, typically from advanced cancer pain. Illegally made and distributed fentanyl has been on the rise. Fentanyl can be mixed with heroin with or without the user's knowledge, increasing the risk of an opioid overdose. Fentanyl can be very dangerous in small doses. In the photo above, a dose of fentanyl is compared to the size of a penny.

Heroin



Heroin is an illegal opioid. Heroin use has increased across the United States among men and women, most age groups, and all income levels. About three out of four new heroin users report abusing prescription opioids before initiating heroin use.