What you should know if your child is prescribed opioids for pain – Opioids, part 5

Opioids are a type of narcotic medication used to treat pain. Children respond differently to opioids, so it is important to be aware of common side effects.

What are the most common side-effects?

- Constipation is the most common side effect. A stool softener or laxative may help with your child’s constipation. You may also discuss other available options with your child’s doctor.

Other side effects may require reducing or stopping the medication. These include:

- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Confusion
- Drowsiness
- Itching

- When taking opioids, children are at risk of having trouble breathing, or breathing at a very slow rate.

Talk to your children about medicine safety.

Teach your children what medicine is and why you or a trusted adult must be the one to give it to them. Asking for help from professionals is the first important step if you think your child has a problem with drugs.

Store opioids safely

Increased rates of adult opioid use has led to increases in opioid poisonings in teens and children, especially toddlers and preschoolers.

- Store medications where children and pets cannot reach them.
- Count and keep track of the number of pills you have in each bottle.
- Always put medications away in a safe and secure location such as a locked cabinet, drawer, or box.
- Make sure the childproof cap is closed tightly after every use. Listen for the “click” sound and check to make sure it cannot be opened by turning the cap.
- Learn about the safe ways to dispose of unused opioid medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about medication disposal options and guidelines for your community.
Know what to do in case of an overdose Always call 911 if you believe someone has overdosed. Ask your doctor about naloxone, a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose.

Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about opioids or substance use disorders. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.