

Thousands of Ontarians at increased risk of death from high opioid doses

People prescribed high doses of opioids may be up to 3 times more likely to die from opioid-related overdose compared to those treated with lower doses.

What does this mean?

- Opioids are a group of drugs that relieve pain; however they have been shown to be addictive and potentially dangerous when taken at high doses, in combination with other drugs (such as sedatives) and alcohol, or when taken by someone with no history of opioid use.
- A third of people using long-acting oxycodone (OxyContin®) may take doses that exceed clinical guidelines.

What should you do?

- ✓ If you are being prescribed an opioid, particularly more than 200mg of morphine (or equivalent) daily, speak with your doctor about other treatment options.
- ✓ Do not change your treatment regimen before contacting your doctor.
- ✓ Do not share you medications. These drugs can be extremely dangerous, particularly when taken by someone with no history of opioid use.

How do we know this?

These findings are the results of a population-based study investigating the relationship between opioid dose and opioid-related mortality for Ontario residents aged 15 to 64 who died of opioid-related overdose between 1997 and 2008. A total of 1,463 Ontarians treated with opioids died of drug-related causes over the study period. Opioid doses exceeding 200 mg of morphine (or equivalent) daily were associated with an almost 3 times higher risk of opioid-related mortality compared to lower doses. Even moderate doses (between 50 and 199mg morphine equivalents daily) were associated with a doubled risk of opioid-related mortality.

Gomes T, Mamdani MM, Dhalla IA, Paterson JM, Juurlink DN. Opioid dose and drug-related mortality in patients with nonmalignant pain. *Arch Intern Med* 2011;171(7):686-691.

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