

# PREGNANCY AND OPIOID PAIN MEDICATIONS



**Women who take opioid pain medications should be aware of the possible risks during pregnancy.**



## What are opioid pain medications?

Opioid pain medications are prescribed by doctors to treat moderate to severe pain. Common types are codeine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, and morphine.



**Before starting or stopping any medications, talk to your provider about the risks and the safest choices for you and your pregnancy.**

## Are opioid pain medications safe for women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant?

Possible risks to your pregnancy include<sup>1,2</sup>:

- **Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS):** withdrawal symptoms (irritability, seizures, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and poor feeding) in newborns<sup>3</sup>
  - Opioid-related NAS is also known as neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NOWS)
- **Neural tube defects:** serious problems in the development (or formation) of the fetus' brain or spine
- **Congenital heart defects:** problems affecting how the fetus' heart develops or how it works
- **Gastroschisis:** birth defect of developing baby's abdomen (belly) or where the intestines stick outside of the body through a hole beside the belly button
- **Stillbirth:** the loss of a pregnancy after 20 or more weeks
- **Preterm delivery:** a birth before 37 weeks

Learn more: [opqic.org/omno](http://opqic.org/omno)

# PREGNANCY AND OPIOID PAIN MEDICATIONS

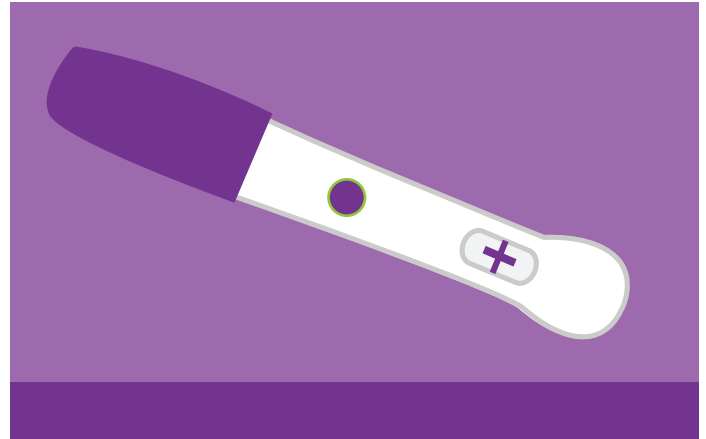


## I just found out that I'm pregnant.

### Should I stop taking my opioid pain medication?

#### What are the risks?

- First, talk to your provider. Discuss all risks and benefits of continuing any medication use during pregnancy.
- Some women need to take opioid pain medication during pregnancy. Quickly stopping your medication can have serious consequences.
- In some cases, avoiding or stopping medication use during pregnancy may be more harmful than taking it.



## What about breastfeeding?

- Women without HIV who are already taking opioid pain medications regularly (and not using illicit drugs) are generally encouraged to breastfeed.
- Be sure to ask your doctor about breastfeeding if you are taking any other medications.
- During breastfeeding, avoid codeine whenever possible, and, if used, ask your doctor for the lowest possible dose due to a possible risk of newborn illness and death.<sup>4</sup>



1. Broussard CS, Rasmussen SA, Reefhuis J, et al. Maternal treatment with opioid analgesics and risk for birth defects. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2011; 204:314:e1-11.
2. Kellogg A, Rose CH, Harms RH, Watson WJ. Current trends in narcotic use in pregnancy and neonatal outcomes. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2011; 204:259:e124.
3. Hudak ML, Tan RC. Committee On Drugs, Committee On Fetus and Newborn, American Academy of Pediatrics. Neonatal drug withdrawal. *Pediatrics* 2012;129:e540-60.
4. National Opioid Use Guideline Group. Canadian guideline for safe and effective use of opioids for chronic non-cancer pain; 2010. Available at: <http://nationalpaincentre.mcmaster.ca/opioid/documents.html>.

The information provided here applies to the use of opioid medication for pain. Opioid medications may also be used in medication-assisted therapy (MAT) for treatment of substance use disorders. There are unique benefits and risks associated with MAT. To learn more about opioid medication use for substance use disorder treatment and considerations in pregnancy, visit: [www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/treatment](http://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/treatment).

**For more information on opioid and other medication use in pregnancy or breastfeeding, go to:**

- [cdc.gov/treatingfortwo](http://cdc.gov/treatingfortwo)
- [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922](http://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922)

Learn more: [opqic.org/omno](http://opqic.org/omno)

This publication was supported by cooperative agreements 6 NU17CE002745-04 and 1 NB01OT009219-01 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services.

This publication was issued by the Oklahoma State Department of Health, an equal opportunity employer and provider. A digital file has been deposited with the Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries in compliance with section 3-114 of Title 65 of the Oklahoma Statutes and is available for download at [documents.ok.gov](http://documents.ok.gov). | Issued May 2023. Adapted with permission from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



OKLAHOMA PERINATAL QUALITY  
IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE