

Analysis shows opioid prescription rates have decreased for US adolescents

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A new analysis reveals that rates of opioid prescribing to US adolescents have decreased in recent years, primarily limited to non-surgery indications. Opioid prescription rates for surgery have remained stable.

The analysis, which is published in [Pediatric Anesthesia](#), assessed data from the 2015–2020 Medical Expenditure Panel Surveys, which are nationally representative, large-scale surveys conducted annually by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Among 26,909 children aged 10–19 years, 4.7% underwent a [surgical procedure](#) in 2015–2020. The surgery rate remained stable between 2015 (4.3%) and 2020 (4.4%) and was lower among minorities.

The combined rate of opioid prescribing for surgical and nonsurgical indications decreased from 4.1% of adolescents in 2015 to 1.4% in 2020. Opioid prescribing for surgery remained relatively stable, however (1% in 2015 and 0.8% in 2020), indicating that the surgical population is becoming a more prominent source of adolescents' overall opioid prescriptions.

The authors call for studies to explore whether associations exist between postsurgical opioid prescribing and the development of problematic opioid use behaviors in youth.

"Adolescence is a critical period for [brain development](#), placing them at increased risk for opioid misuse. Opioids can be highly addictive, so understanding prescribing patterns is crucial for mitigating risks," said corresponding author Cornelius B. Groenewald, MB, ChB, of Seattle Children's Hospital.

"There are increasing data suggesting that opioid prescription post-surgery can lead to problematic opioid use, even in previously opioid-naïve patients; however, undertreatment of postsurgical pain is also a significant problem among adolescents. As surgical procedures are often the first encounter adolescents may have with opioid medications, understanding these prescriptions is important."

More information: Opioid prescription rates associated with surgery among adolescents in the USA from 2015-2020, *Pediatric Anesthesia* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/pan.14753](https://doi.org/10.1111/pan.14753)

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