


Coaches, activity directors and trainers are in a position to develop close relationships with students. These connections can provide valuable guidance, support and mentorship, and can make a profound difference in the lives of young people. Such relationships can also add personal impact in addressing the rules and expectations about drug use that guide interscholastic athletics and activities.

Teenagers benefit in many ways from participation in athletics and activities. Inherent with participation in these programs is the risk of injury. In rare cases, injuries may result in pain that is severe or long-lasting enough to require a prescription painkiller. When students are prescribed pain medication after an injury or surgery, they may receive opioids, which can be misused if not monitored carefully.

In 2016, Massachusetts had 1,933 confirmed opioid overdose deaths, a 17% increase from 2015 and a 42% increase since 2014. Coaches and adult leaders can play an important role in educating students about the dangers of opioid misuse, complementing the efforts of parents, teachers and other adults.

This document was designed to assist coaches and others involved in high school athletics and activities in helping to prevent opioid misuse among students. The information can be integrated into pre-season meetings and other events at your school. Please keep these suggestions, facts and resources in mind as you meet with your students and their families, and as you work with colleagues.

 More information and downloadable handouts can be found on the MasTAPP website:
<http://masstapp.edc.org/rx-student-athlete>

 You can also order print copies or download them for parents, teachers, and others at:
<http://massclearinghouse.ehs.state.ma.us/BSASPRO/SA3571.html>

What to do when sports injuries occur:

- Be honest about the limitations and discomfort that injuries pose. Pain exists for a reason. Ignoring it or masking it with drugs is not in the athlete's best interest.
- Return-to-play decisions should be determined by the medical professionals involved with the injured athlete, such as physicians, athletic trainers, or other outside professionals—not the athlete, coach, or athlete's parents. However, it is important to keep lines of communication open between these parties.
- Document the treatment and return-to-play plan, and share it with all parties involved in an injured athlete's care and sports participation.
- An injured athlete needs time to heal. Missing a game or two is better than missing an entire season or more.

Consider the injured athlete's social and emotional health:

- Sports injuries can have an impact on the social and emotional life of a student athlete. Being sidelined and losing a structured activity may lead to depression, loss of connection to friends, and loss of identity as an athlete. Speak with injured athletes about how they can stay involved with the team even if they are not able to get back on the field.

What to do if an injury occurs and pain management is needed:

- Opioids for pain should be considered only by physicians—and only when other approaches have not provided relief. Consider ice, heat, rest, or over-the-counter non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, as appropriate.
- Students and their families should talk openly with their health care providers about the medications, their proper use, possible risks and side effects, and any alternatives.

- Medication should be left at home or dispensed by school nurses (as required by law).
- Medications should not be shared with anyone.
- Mindfulness techniques, relaxation exercises, and physical therapy can also assist in pain management.

What to know about prescription opioids:

- Common names of prescription opioids are Vicodin, OxyContin, oxycodone, Percocet, fentanyl, Opana, and codeine. They should be used only as prescribed, with only the minimal amount taken for the shortest period needed for effective relief.
- Unused medication should not be shared; it should be stored securely and disposed of properly, due to the high risk of accidental overdose by people and pets. You can find locations of prescription drop boxes online www.mass.gov/DrugDropbox.

Physical signs that someone may be misusing opioids:

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| ➤ Slurred speech | ➤ Euphoria |
| ➤ Itching or flushed skin | ➤ Shallow or slow breathing |
| ➤ Constipation | ➤ Small pupils |
| ➤ No feeling of pain | ➤ Nausea and/or vomiting |

Behavioral signs of addiction:

- Neglecting other activities; decreased attendance or performance at work or school
- Taking serious risks in order to obtain the drug
- New relationship issues, or acting out against close friends or family (particularly those who try to address the substance use problem)
- Going out of one’s way to hide the amount of substance consumed, and/or unusual secrecy about how one’s time is spent while under the influence
- Experiencing unexplained injuries or accidents
- Seriously changing one’s physical appearance or neglecting personal hygiene

Helpful Resources:

The Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline offers information about treatment and prevention services:

<http://helpline-online.com/> 1-800-327-5050

TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse provides free education resources:

<https://massclearinghouse.ehs.state.ma.us/>

MassTAPP offers statewide substance use prevention information: <http://masstapp.edc.org>

The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) provides programs and resources for school staff and students: <http://www.miaa.net>

For more information on naloxone, the overdose reversal drug, and how to obtain it from a pharmacy, visit the Massachusetts Department of Public Health website: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/substance-abuse/naloxone-info.pdf>