



# PAUSE

## BEFORE YOU PRESCRIBE

Prescription drug dependency is harming pregnant women and their infants at alarming rates. You can be part of the solution.

Retail pharmacy prescriptions for opioids, such as the pain medicines Hydrocodone and Oxycodone, have increased more than 50 percent since 1991, with nearly a quarter of a billion prescriptions filled in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, the number of pregnant women using opioids increased fivefold from 2000 to 2009, while the number of infants with withdrawal symptoms almost tripled.<sup>2</sup>

**Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)**, also known as neonatal withdrawal syndrome, is a set of distressing physical symptoms in infants born to mothers who took opioids or other drugs during pregnancy.

The symptoms for NAS can range from mild to severe and may include:

- Feeding difficulties
- Tremors and irritability
- Vomiting and Diarrhea
- Low birth weight
- Breathing problems
- Seizures

*“Physicians have correctly been taught to relieve pain. However, we have swung too far and are now overprescribing narcotics...and contributing to the narcotic addiction epidemic.”*

– MICHELE WALSH MD,  
OPQC NEONATOLOGY CLINICAL LEAD

*“If only someone had told me how just a tiny little pill could lead to my horrible heroin addiction...it would have saved me and my baby a lot of pain.” – JULIE*



## A Public Health Epidemic

- **Every 25 minutes**, an infant is born with NAS in the United States.<sup>3</sup>
- In Ohio, treating infants born with NAS cost **almost \$100 million** & nearly **25,000 inpatient days** in 2013<sup>4</sup>
- The rate of NAS in Ohio grew almost **800%** from 2004 to 2013:



Hospitalization Rates for Babies with NAS in Ohio, 2004 to 2013 (Rate per 10,000)

Source: Ohio Hospital Association



## How You Can Help Stem the Epidemic in Ohio

Please follow these steps when prescribing opioids to women of reproductive age.

### 1. PRESCRIBE SAFELY



Prescribe minimum amounts of opioids for the shortest duration required to treat acute pain. Look for non-narcotic alternatives for chronic pain.

### 2. TALK WITH YOUR PATIENTS ABOUT ADDICTION RISKS AND ABOUT CONTRACEPTIVE OPTIONS



Ask your patient about their health history or family history with addiction. Also, ask if she is on birth control and suggest a long-acting reversible contraception (LARC).

### 3. CONSULT THE OHIO AUTOMATED RX REPORTING SYSTEM (OARRS) PRIOR TO WRITING OPIOID PRESCRIPTIONS



Ohio state law requires, with limited exceptions that prior to writing opioid prescriptions, the prescriber must request patient information from OARRS. Using OARRS offers insight into a patient's use of opioids and other controlled substances. OARRS also alerts prescribers to medication conflicts and signs of abuse, addiction or diversion.

*“It’s important to ask all women of reproductive age what their plans are for future pregnancies at each encounter in all healthcare settings. It is critical in the prevention of NAS to recommend and provide highly effective contraception to women who could get pregnant and require chronic narcotics.”*

– MICHAEL MARCOTTE MD,  
OPQC OBSTETRIC FACULTY

Recommendations endorsed by: State Medical Board of Ohio, Ohio Board of Nursing, Ohio State Dental Board, State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy



The Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative (OPQC) is a

statewide network of perinatal clinicians, hospitals, policy makers, and governmental entities that aims, through the use of improvement science, to reduce preterm births and improve birth outcomes across Ohio.

Sponsoring organizations:



John R. Kasich, Governor  
John B. McCarthy, Director



- 1 United States. Cong. Senate. Caucus on International Narcotics Control. “America’s Addiction to Opioids” Hearings, May 14, 2014 (statement of Nora D. Volkow, M.D., Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse).
- 2 Patrick S, Schumacher R, Benneyworth B, et al. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and Associated Health Care Expenditures: United States, 2000–2009. *JAMA*. 2012;307(18):1934–1940. doi:10.1001/jama.2012.3951.
- 3 Patrick S, Davis M, Lehman C, et al. Increasing Incidence and Geographic Distribution of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome: United States 2009 to 2012. *Journal of Perinatology*. 2015 April 30. doi:10.1038/jp.2015.36
- 4 Ohio Department of Health. (2015, March). Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) in Ohio, 2004–2013: Preliminary Report. Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Health, Violence and Injury Prevention Program.

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More information:

[opqc.net/pausebeforeyouprescribe](http://opqc.net/pausebeforeyouprescribe)