

OPIOID MISUSE IN GEORGIA

Opioids are a class of drugs that act in the nervous system to produce feelings of pleasure and pain relief.¹

THREE CATEGORIES OF OPIOIDS²

1

Prescription Opioids

- Prescribed for moderate to severe pain
- Can be addictive and dangerous if misused
- Known as: oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine, and methadone

2

Fentanyl

- Powerful synthetic pain reliever
- Prescribed for severe pain (like advanced cancer)
- Illegally made fentanyl is driving a surge in overdoses

3

Heroin

- Illegal opioid with no medical use in the United States
- Highly addictive
- Use has increased across the country among both genders, most age groups, and all income levels

WHAT IS ADDICTION?³

Addiction (termed “substance dependence” by the American Psychiatric Association) is defined as a **brain disease** that leads to compulsive substance use despite harmful consequences.

IMPACT OF OPIOID MISUSE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Opioid misuse and addiction can profoundly affect children and adolescents. When parents misuse opioids, children may face serious challenges, from health complications at birth to inadequate supervision and other experiences that threaten their immediate and long-term wellbeing.⁴ For young people themselves, opioid misuse can quickly lead to addiction, disrupting brain development, hindering academic success, and even shortening life expectancy.⁵

Parental Opioid Misuse

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, or NAS, occurs when a newborn experiences withdrawal symptoms after being exposed to drugs in the womb. This can include both prescription medications or illegal substances.⁶

762 confirmed cases of NAS in Georgia in 2017*, and **20%** were attributed to opioids.⁷

More than **1 in 3** infants with NAS were born to mothers 25-29 years of age.⁸

Parental substance abuse was a factor in **41.5%** of children entering the foster care system in FY2023.⁹

Youth Opioid Misuse

During the 2024-2025 school year, among middle and high school students, who completed the Georgia Student Health Survey:



26,937 students reported taking a prescription drug painkiller that was not prescribed for them within the last 30 days.¹⁰



19,870 students reported using heroin within the last 30 days.¹¹

**2017 is the latest publicly available data*



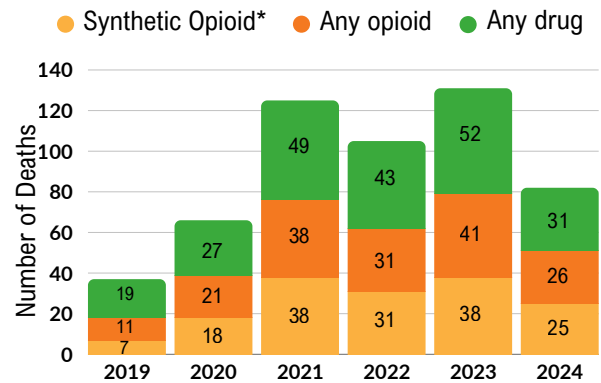
OPIOID DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENTS(10-19 YEAR OLDS) IN GEORGIA

- In 2024, **84%** of all overdose deaths among adolescents involved opioids.^{[12](#)}

From 2019-2024, Georgia saw: ^{[13](#)}

- a **136%** increase in opioid overdose deaths
- an **257%** increase in overdoses involving synthetic opioids (e.g., Fentanyl)
- Fentanyl overdoses rise to **78% for adolescents**, compared to 53% for adults.

Overdose Deaths Among Adolescents, by Drug Type, Georgia, 2019-2024 ^{[14](#)}



*Synthetic Opioids (e.g., Fentanyl) other than Methadone

SELECT EXAMPLES OF GEORGIA'S RESPONSE

Naloxone Access:

Pharmacists statewide can dispense naloxone (Narcan), a life-saving overdose reversal drug ^{[15](#)}

State Coordination

Georgia's **Opioid and Substance Misuse Unit** leads workgroups on prevention, treatment, data, and enforcement ^{[16](#)}

Youth Initiative

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council funds programs to improve data collection, overdose prevention training, and youth treatment services ^{[17](#)}

Settlement Funds

Georgia secured \$636 million from a national opioid settlement to support prevention and recovery efforts to be paid out over 18 years.^{[18](#)} As of January 2024, Georgia had received \$118.9 million.^{[19](#)}

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase promotion of the state's Good Samaritan law.
- Leverage opioid abatement funds to support youth-focused and youth-informed prevention, treatment and harm-reduction efforts.
- Fund and increase Naloxone awareness campaigns and training.
- Continue to fund, provide training to, and expand the reach of family treatment courts to provide dependency diversion programs for parents, caregivers, and youth.
- Continue to invest in peer supports for mental health and/or substance use recovery and support services (e.g., Certified Peer Specialists - Mental Health, -Forensic Peer Mentors, -Whole Health and Wellness Coach, -Youth, and -Addictive Disease).

Infant-Toddler Courts, which use a collaborative, trauma-informed model, have demonstrated success in reducing foster care placements, supporting family reunification, and strengthening long-term outcomes for young children and their caregivers. ^{[20](#)}

SCAN BELOW TO SEE
FACTSHEET CITATIONS



REFERENCES FOR OPIOID MISUSE IN GEORGIA

- 1 National Institute on Drug Abuse. "What are prescription opioids?" Retrieved August 23, 2025 from <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/prescription-opioids>.
- 2 Georgia Prevention Project, Substance Abuse Research Alliance. "Prescription Opioids and Heroin Epidemic in Georgia." Retrieved November 15, 2023 from <https://www.senate.ga.gov/sro/documents/studycommrpts/opioidsappendix.pdf>.
- 3 American Psychiatric Association. "What is Addiction?" Retrieved August 23, 2025 from <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/addiction-substance-use-disorders/what-is-a-substance-use-disorder>.
- 4 Romanowicz, M., Vande Voort, J. L., Shekunov, J., Oesterle, T. S., Thusius, N. J., Rummans, T. A., Croarkin, P. E., Karpyak, V. M., Lynch, B. A., & Schak, K. M. (2019). The effects of parental opioid use on the parent-child relationship and children's developmental and behavioral outcomes: a systematic review of published reports. *Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health*, 13, 5. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-019-0266-3>.
- 5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth high-risk drug use. Accessed September 2025 from <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-behavior/risk-behaviors/youth-high-risk-drug-use.html>; Squeglia, L. M., Jacobus, J., & Tapert, S. F. (2009). The influence of substance use on adolescent brain development. *Clinical EEG and neuroscience*, 40(1), 31–38. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/155005940904000110>.
- 6 Georgia Department of Public Health. "Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome. Retrieved August 23, 2025 from <https://dph.georgia.gov/NAS>.
- 7 Georgia Department of Public Health. "Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, Annual Surveillance Report, 2017. Retrieved August 23, 2025 from <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/publication/nas-2017-annual-report/download>.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Georgia Division of Family and Children Services. Data Request. Received October 12, 2023.
- 10 Georgia Department of Education. (2024). Georgia Student Health Survey 2024–2025: Statewide Results. Retrieved August 23, 2025 from https://apps.gadoe.org/GSHSSurveyResults/GSHS_State_Reports/2024/State_Report_2024.xlsx.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Department of Public Health. Online Analytical Statistical Information System. Retrieved August 23, 2025 from <https://oasis.state.ga.us/oasis/webquery/qryDrugOverdose.aspx>.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Georgia General Assembly. "Jeffrey Dallas Ga, Jr. Act," 2017. Accessed November 15, 2023. <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20172018/SB/121>.
- 16 Department of Public Health. "Georgia's Opioid Response." Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://dph.georgia.gov/georgias-opioid-response>.
- 17 Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. "Opioid Affected Youth Initiative (OAYI) FY 2020 Request for Proposals." Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://cjcc.georgia.gov/document/document/opioid-affected-youth-initiative-oayi-fy-2020-request-proposals/download>.
- 18 Governor's Office of the State of Georgia. Gov. Kemp Signs Major Opioid Legislation to Secure \$636 Million for Treatment and Prevention. Retrieved August 25, 2025 from <https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2022-05-02/gov-kemp-signs-major-opioid-legislation-secure-636-million-treatment-and>.
- 19 House Budget and Research Office. Georgia Opioid Settlement Update. Retrieved September 23, 2025 from https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/document/docs/default-source/house-budget-and-research-office-document-library/newsandhighlights/2025/2025_policy_brief_opioid_settlement_funds.pdf.
- 20 Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. 2023. The movement toward infant-toddler courts in Georgia. Retrieved September 2025 from <https://geears.org/news/the-movement-toward-infant-toddler-courts-in-georgia/>.