

# Warning Signs That a Person Might be Using Heroin

As many of you are aware, Ohio has a prescription drug abuse and heroin problem. Recently there was an incident at an Ohio Children's hospital where a mother was found dead in her child's room and the father overdosed in the bathroom from heroin. Below is information to help you as the healthcare provider, recognize heroin use in a patient or family member.

## Direct Signs, Symptoms

- In Ohio, heroin users tend to be Caucasian, and 18-35 years of age.
- Persistent hacking cough (common if heroin is smoked)
- Dry mouth
- Extremely small pinpoint pupils (if using heroin)
- Extremely large pupils (if withdrawing from heroin)
- Eyelids and arms/legs appear to be heavy
- Cuts, bruises or scabs from skin picking (heroin causes the body to release histamine which leads to itchy skin, which may be scratched to point of causing a sore or scab)
- Infections or abscesses (from injecting)
- Strong smell of cigarette or marijuana smoke (heroin addicts often smoke both)
- Lack of hygiene and disregard for physical appearance, may not shower or bathe, repeat wearing of same clothing
- Sores on nostrils or lips (from smoking)
- Nosebleeds (from snorting)
- Burn marks on fingers or mouth (from smoking)
- Dark circles or puffiness under the eyes
- Flu like symptoms: fever, achy, vomiting, always cold
- Runny nose or constant sniffing (from the release of histamine heroin causes)
- Needle marks on arms or legs (could look like small bruises or red dots)
- Constipation (when using heroin), or diarrhea (when withdrawing)

## Behaviors That May Indicate Heroin Abuse

- Movement is slowed or uncoordinated
- Disoriented
- Extreme alertness/jitteriness followed by suddenly nodding off
- Excessive or sudden sleeping
- Itchiness, picking at skin (histamine release from heroin)
- Speech somewhat slurred, garbled or incoherent
- Very little motivation, apathy, no interest in favorite activities
- Hostility toward others
- Lying or other deceptive behavior
- Avoiding eye contact
- Wearing long pants or long sleeves (to hide needle marks) even in very warm weather
- Suddenly wearing sunglasses frequently or inappropriately

## Indirect Warnings Signs of Heroin Use

- Missing prescription pills (or entire bottles), especially Vicodin® (hydrocodone), OxyContin® (oxycodone) or codeine
- Missing money or valuables in the work area.
- Missing (1cc) syringes
- Needles or syringes (at home check sock and other drawers)
- Tiny orange caps from syringes
- Spoons with burn marks (used to heat the heroin in water prior to injection)
- Aluminum foil or gum wrappers with burn marks (used to smoke heroin)
- Missing shoelaces (used to tie off injection sites)
- Rubber straps or bands (used to tie off)
- Straws (used to snort), especially with burn marks (used to smoke)
- Empty plastic pen cases (used for snorting or smoking)
- Small plastic bags
- Empty plastic/drug capsules (heroin sometimes sold in capsules)
- Antihistamine boxes (used to counteract histamine release)
- Nasal spray bottles (used for snorting heroin/water mixture)
- Very small cotton balls, Q-tips, or pieces of cigarette filter (used prior to injecting)

If you notice any of the signs, symptoms, behaviors or warning signs in a patient or family member here at Nationwide Children's Hospital please notify Security at 2 and your manager or nursing supervisor.

### For more information contact:

**Medication Assisted Treatment for Addiction (MATA) Program** at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

MATA treats opioid/heroin addicted patients up to 21 years of age

Phone is (614) 355-8614

Questions may be directed to the clinic or Dr. Steve Matson at

**Steven.Matson@NationwideChildrens.org.**

### *Information is adapted from:*

*54 Heroin Abuse or Addiction Warning Signs, New Hope Recovery Center,  
2835 N. Sheffield Ave., Suite 304 Chicago, IL 60657*



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™*