



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Thomas Farley, MD MPH
Commissioner

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Dear Health Care Professional:

Opioid analgesic misuse and its associated health consequences, including death, are epidemic in New York City (NYC) and across the country. In 2011, more than one opioid analgesic overdose death occurred every other day in NYC. Staten Island residents had the highest rate in 2011 — 11.2 opioid analgesic overdose deaths/ 100,000 persons, a rate approximately four times higher than all other boroughs. With your help, additional deaths can be prevented. The Health Department is reaching out to providers across Staten Island to ask for your partnership in addressing this serious problem.

As a health care provider, you can play a central role in reversing this epidemic because most opioid analgesics that are misused or that result in overdose likely originate from a prescription, written by providers seeking to alleviate pain. Following safe and judicious opioid prescribing practices can both protect your patients and reduce the potential for misuse among others. Small changes in your practice carried out on a daily basis can make a powerful impact on the health of your patients and the Staten Island community.

The Health Department recommends:

- For most cases of acute pain, non-opioid pain relievers (e.g., acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) are appropriate. When prescribing opioid analgesics for severe acute pain, prescribe only short-acting agents; a 3-day supply is usually sufficient.
- For chronic non-cancer pain, avoid prescribing opioids unless other approaches to analgesia have been demonstrated to be ineffective.
- When prescribing opioid analgesics, calculate the total daily morphine milligram equivalents (MME); compared with dosages between 0 and 20 MME, dosages ≥ 20 MME increase overdose risk; dosages ≥ 100 MME increase overdose risk by 9 times.

We hope you will find the clinical tools, resources, and patient education materials on opioid analgesics in this Action Kit useful. A Health Department representative is visiting you to discuss ways of applying these methods and materials in your practice.

Thank you for your dedication to the health of Staten Islanders, and for your partnership in reversing this epidemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Thomas Farley'.

Thomas Farley, MD MPH
Commissioner