

Patients may be at higher risk of overdose when opioid therapy for pain is discontinued

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Opioid-related overdose is now a leading cause of accidental death in the United States and Canada. A study published December 1 in the open access journal *PLOS Medicine* by Mary Clare Kennedy at University of

British Columbia, Kelowna, Canada, and colleagues suggests discontinuing prescribed opioids was associated with increased overdose risk.

Canada and the United States have implemented guidelines to restrict opioid prescribing for chronic pain in an effort to reduce opioid-related illness and death. However, the effects of discontinuing opioid treatments on overdose risk are understudied.

In order to better understand associations between discontinuation of prescribed opioid therapy for pain and risk of overdose, researchers conducted a retrospective cohort study of people receiving long-term opioid therapy for pain in British Columbia between October 2014 and June 2018. They analyzed the [medical histories](#) of 14,037 patients registered with the provincial health insurance client roster in British Columbia who had been on opioid therapy for at least 90 days.

The researchers found that discontinuing opioid therapy for pain was associated with increased overdose risk among people without opioid use disorder (OUD). Yet the association was stronger in those with OUD, including those not receiving opioid agonist therapy (AHR = 3.18; 95% CI = 1.87–5.40, p

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