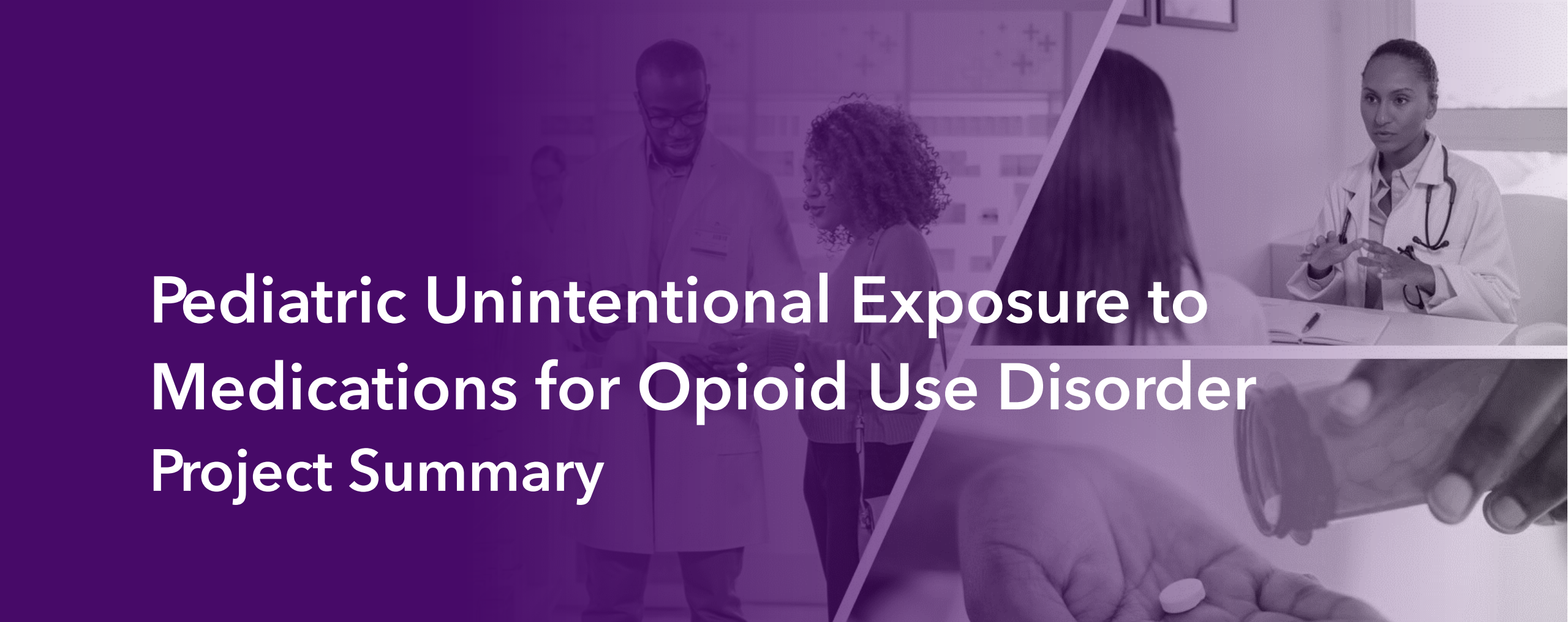




Pediatric Unintentional Exposure to Medications for Opioid Use Disorder Project Summary

October 2025

This activity is one part of a multi-part Foundation project related to substance use disorder. The multi-part project is supported by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an overall award of \$2,470,442 of federal funds (100% of the project). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by FDA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.



Project Overview



Addressing Pediatric Unintentional Exposure (PUE) to Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)

MOUD, including buprenorphine-containing transmucosal products for the treatment of opioid dependence and methadone, are highly effective at managing opioid use disorder and have a critical role in addressing the overdose crisis; however, evidence supports a concerning level of risk from pediatric unintentional exposure to these medications.

This project sought to:

- 1) identify knowledge gaps in current storage and emergency response information provided to parents/caregivers/household members who take MOUD and have young children, and
- 2) develop message frameworks and strategies (e.g., communications, education) to reduce risk of PUE and poisoning, without adversely affecting patient access or contributing to stigma.

Our Four-Step Approach



1

Landscape Analysis

Identified key information gaps in current medication storage education and learned from other child safety campaigns, including media/social media surrounding MOUD

2

Interviews

Learned from the experiences and insights of parents/caregivers and other adults who are currently taking or formerly have taken MOUD with children ages 6 years or under in the household

3

Roundtable

Gathered perspectives from people with lived experience, community-based organizations, health care professionals, and state and federal health agencies related to gaps in existing resources, content and format of potential messaging, and potential facilitators for message sharing

4

Message Development & Testing

Developed, tested, and refined credible and practical message frameworks for key audiences; tested impact, recall, and drive to action with intended audiences (as well as for reaction from incidental audiences) using expert engagement, individual interviews, and online polling

Emergent Themes from Preliminary Research



Theme	Challenges
Healthcare providers are trusted sources of information	• Not all specialties/prescribers who provide MOUD receive education/training about preventing and responding to pediatric exposures • Providers are busy, which prevents them from performing extensive patient counseling
Safe storage information is needed and useful	• Storing medications out-of-reach could negatively impact dosing routine • Supportive technology and innovative solutions for medication storage exist but are not always feasible • Storing medication in lock bag/box can make the patient a target for theft • Cost of safe storage devices can be prohibitive
More information is needed on what to do in case of exposure	• Gaps in patient/caregiver/family knowledge • Concerns about cost and transportation
Some patients expressed concerns about or experienced stigma	• Patients/caregivers may feel guilty about their addiction and blame themselves for having MOUD in the home—especially if a child is unintentionally exposed • Patients/caregivers fear being lectured, judged, or subjected to legal implications, which may hinder their ability to respond to PUE in a timely manner

Message Frameworks – and how to use them

Fundamentals of Effective Messaging

1

WHO: Identify your intended audience

2

WHAT: Identify the message(s) you want to tell your intended audience

3

HOW: Tailor the message framework and choose your messenger

4

WHY: Fill information gaps so that your intended audience has the knowledge to take appropriate action

How to Use Message Frameworks



These slides contain message frameworks* that can be used by organizations looking to reduce the risk of PUE without adversely affecting patient access to MOUD or contributing to stigma.

The frameworks developed from this research can be adapted as standalone messaging or used to supplement ongoing safe storage education, such as programs conducted by federal, state, and local agencies as well as health care providers, clinics, harm reduction organizations, and other community groups.

**Message frameworks contain a conceptual idea that can be tailored for specific audiences or groups of people to better resonate with their experiences and characteristics, including age, geographic location, healthcare/support setting, or medication.*

Message Frameworks



"Medications for opioid use disorder can be lifesaving for you, but deadly for young children—even in small amounts. Don't leave out a single dose or drop. Immediately wash any cups or containers that may have come in contact with the medication."



"Keep little hands away from big harm. Store all medications, including those for opioid use disorder, in their original child-resistant packaging and secure them safely away from curious kids."



"Make safe storage part of your routine to protect those around you. Keep medications for opioid use disorder in child-resistant packaging and out of reach whether at home or on-the-go. Even a single dose unsecured in a purse, backpack or suitcase could be deadly to a child."



"Safe storage is important with medications for opioid use disorder and so is having an emergency plan. If you think a child has accidentally been exposed, call Poison Control, give Naloxone, and dial 911—no matter what."



"If you suspect a child may have been exposed to opioid use disorder medications, you need to act fast. Unexplained slow breathing or sleepiness could signal potential exposure. Give naloxone and call Poison Control or 911."

Customize Messages Based on Audience



While there are common themes across groups, it's important to account for nuances

Message Element	Example Nuances	Considerations
Language	• Use descriptive words rather than vague references such as “residue” or “surfaces” • Be intentional about using the generic drug name “naloxone” vs. a name brand such as “Narcan” as it could be viewed as product endorsement	• Keep language plain and simple • Use specific descriptive words • Keep language audience appropriate • Speak directly to the identified audience
MOUD	• Type of Medication • Methadone – liquid (drops, droplets) • Buprenorphine – film strip, tablet • Storage and medication-taking routines	• Consider dosage forms available • Consider packaging of the medication • Include the actual medication name in place of “MOUD” where appropriate • Instructions for washing, wiping, or throwing away can also be specified
Emergency Action	• Order of Emergency Action • Call Poison Control, give naloxone, and dial 911 • Give naloxone and call Poison Control or 911	• Some people may not be comfortable with or fear that law enforcement will become involved by calling 911 • The message can be distributed with the poison control number and include helpful hints such as “keep the poison control number in your phone”
Safety Outside of the Home	• If not safely secured, even a single dose in a purse, pocket, backpack or suitcase could be deadly to a child • Traveling from the pharmacy to home also is a vulnerable “on-the-go” moment	• Consider how the medication may be stored or packaged in various situations • Use specific, descriptive words rather than vague references
Other Adults	• Visitors to a household with young children may include people taking MOUDs • Customize messaging for grandparents, relatives, babysitters, friends and visitors	• Increase awareness and educate others how to safely store MOUDs around children

Opportunities to Disseminate Messages



People often respond best when messages are delivered by people and organizations they trust and are shared in places they encounter in their everyday lives – for example, where they work, learn, shop, receive healthcare, and find information.

Below are potential ideas to consider for your community:

- Distribute when medications are dispensed at pharmacy or clinic
- Share during in-service or other staff trainings since healthcare providers were identified among the most trusted messengers
- Create factsheets and easy takeaway materials
- Partner with pharmacies and health clinics to display messages on signs, television screens or other media present in waiting areas
- Incorporate into web content and social media posts
- Incorporate messages into shared personal stories
- Create blogs and vlogs around a message

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