

Morphine

What is Morphine?

Morphine is a medicine for managing pain and shortness of breath. It can provide more pain relief than products available over the counter.

How is it given?

Children can take morphine as tablets or liquid. Depending on their symptoms, they can take it when needed for symptom relief, or they might need to take it regularly every few hours. Sometimes in these cases, if their pain and morphine dose is stable, they can be changed to a longer-acting, “controlled release” form of morphine that does not have to be taken as often. ***Controlled release capsules and tablets should not be crushed or chewed – they must be swallowed whole.*** In some cases, capsules can be opened and the beads contained inside can be administered into a feeding tube or mixed with soft foods and swallowed whole – talk to the team first.

Children who cannot take medication by mouth can have morphine administered through an IV or under the skin (subcutaneous catheter).

What is the dose?

Our team will work out a starting dose (usually based on your child’s weight), which may need to be increased or decreased. The amount of morphine needed varies between children. If your child is receiving regular doses of the medication, **do not stop** the medication without consulting your child’s doctor. Any dose changes (increases or decreases) need to be monitored carefully with the help of your child’s medical team.

The optimal dose of morphine is the amount that eases your child’s pain or shortness of breath. To provide your child with optimal symptom control and minimal side effects, tell the team if you think your child is still experiencing pain or shortness of breath.

Your child’s body may get used to a certain dose of morphine, and so the dose may need to be increased over time. This is called “tolerance”. A dose increase does not mean your child’s condition is getting worse or your child is becoming addicted.

Do they really need it?

Children can move about, participate in activities, and interact with family if their pain or shortness of breath is well controlled. This improves their quality of life.

What are the side effects of morphine?

The side effects of morphine are well known and include:

- **Constipation:** Children taking morphine will often need to take a laxative.
- **Nausea and vomiting:** Nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting happens in some children, but usually gets better in a few days. Some children may need to take extra medication to help with nausea.
- **Drowsiness:** Many children are drowsy in the first few days after morphine is started or after the dose is increased, but this improves with time.



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- **Slowed breathing:** If the first dose is too high or the dose is increased too quickly, a child's breathing might slow down more than is wanted. As a result, the team will monitor changes in dose.
- **Itching:** Some children get itchy when taking morphine. The team may consider treating this with another medicine, or changing to a different pain reliever..

Sometimes, the side effects may become uncomfortable or intolerable, or not well managed by using other medications. If this happens, your child may need to change to another similar medication instead.

If you have any questions call a Canuck Place Nurse at 604-742-3478 and for immediate assistance call the Kid's Counter at 604-742-3475