

What is the “Start Talking Maryland Act”?

The act, passed by state lawmakers this year and signed by Gov. Larry Hogan, requires public schools to offer drug education that includes the dangers of heroin and other opioids starting as early as third grade.

- **Students** in grades 3 – 5 will receive lessons from the school counselor, supported by the school nurse. These lessons will focus on:
 - **Third grade:** Recognizing prescription vs. non-prescription drugs; how to use them safely, choices and problem-solving, and an introduction to what opioid drugs are. They will be using a book: *Charlie and the Curious Club: Candy or Medicine*.
 - **Fourth grade:** Learning about the physical effects of drugs, understanding why substance abuse is a problem, understanding what addiction is, and understanding how they can contribute to solving the problem of substance abuse on a community level. They will be working with materials from KidsHealth and recent news clips to be a detective, understand the problem and design a PSA, video clip, poster or other activity to address the problem.
 - **Fifth grade:** Learning and practicing strategies to deal with peer pressure, using refusal skills to build confidence to deal with uncomfortable situations when they might be asked to do drugs, recognize the effects opioids have on their brains. Students develop a list of strategies and will receive a pocket card with strategies and resources on it.
 - **Secondary students** will receive instruction for the “Start Talking Maryland Act” through the AACPS Health Education curriculum. Health standards will be taught to middle school students in grades 6 through 8 through the Health curriculum. High school students will

be taught the health standards through the mandatory Health class, a high school graduation requirement.

- **School nurses will work with the athletic directors in the high school to reach out to student athletes at “Meet the Coach” meetings, as this is a particularly vulnerable group.** Research suggests that young athletes who have sports/activities injuries are often prescribed painkillers without receiving sufficient directions about how long and how often to take these medications.

Why is it important that children receive this instruction in school?

School provides a safe place where children can learn what to do in unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations. Trusted adults will provide students with an opportunity to practice handling these situations so that the first time a young person is faced with an unsafe situation, he or she knows what to do and has practiced doing it. Students will identify trusted adults, both inside and outside of the school, where they can go for help.

How will I know when and what will be taught to my child about substance abuse and opioids? Parents will be sent a letter prior to the lessons being taught to inform them about when the lessons will be delivered by the school counselor and providing an opportunity to review the materials. Parents can opt out of having their child(ren) participate in the lessons and an alternative activity will be provided. Follow up activities to the lessons will be sent home.

Are there resources parents can access to help them recognize warning signs and talk with their child(ren) about how to keep themselves safe?

Yes. The [Not My Child](#) website has tips for parents about recognizing warning signs and what to do if you learn/suspect that your child has been/is using opioids

or other illegal substances. Similarly, the [Maryland State Department of Education](#) has many resources for parents on the topic of preventing opioid and Heroin use and abuse.

If you have specific questions or concerns regarding secondary opioid prevention lessons, feel free to contact your child's health educator. If you have specific concerns regarding the elementary lessons, please contact your child's school counselor.