

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA: REPORTING ON LOPERAMIDE MISUSE



## WHY IT MATTERS

Avoiding sensationalized or stigmatizing language when reporting about loperamide misuse is essential in preventing misuse.

Sensationalized language may:

- Make the behavior seem safe or normal.
- Unintentionally influence at-risk people to misuse loperamide.

Stigmatizing language may discourage people who are at risk from seeking treatment.

**WHEN REPORTING ON LOPERAMIDE MISUSE,**  
refer to the AP Stylebook and consider the following:

## DO THIS...

- » **Use an appropriate modifier with the word "use" — such as "risky," "unhealthy," "excessive," or "heavy." Or use the term "misuse."**
- » **Use the phrase "person with an addiction."**
- » **Provide a resource for readers who may have an addiction to find support.**
- » **Use matter-of-fact headlines like:**  
*"Man died from anti-diarrhea ingredient that can be 'dangerous' if misused, officials say."*  
*"Some people with opioid addiction turn to anti-diarrhea drugs, a risky choice."*

## RATHER THAN...

- » **Using the words "abuse" or "problem."**
- » **Referring to an individual as "an addict."**
- » **Stigmatizing people who may have an addiction by implying that they can easily change their behavior or using phrases like "getting clean."**
- » **Using sensationalized headlines like:**  
*"Yes, people are really using an anti-diarrhea medicine to get high."*  
*"Man dies from anti-diarrhea drug poisoning; experts say cases up 167%."*

## LOPERAMIDE BACKGROUND

Loperamide (brand name Imodium®) is an over-the-counter and prescription medication approved by the FDA to relieve the symptoms of diarrhea. Loperamide is used by millions of consumers and is safe and effective when used as directed.

Loperamide is a peripherally acting mu opioid agonist — a type of synthetic opiate that blocks the opioid receptors in the gut. At very high doses, loperamide can cross the blood-brain barrier and cause opioid-like effects. A small number of individuals are intentionally misusing loperamide by consuming very high doses in an attempt to self-manage their opioid withdrawal symptoms or to achieve a euphoric high. At doses higher than directed, loperamide may cause these individuals to experience severe or fatal cardiac events.

## SOURCES

- <https://www.apstylebook.com/>
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/06/11/531931490/change-from-addict-to-person-with-an-addiction-is-long-overdue>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3272222/>