

## **Punjab's Opioid Crisis**

### **What is the issue?**

\n\n

\n

- Punjab is one of the hotbeds of drug abuse in India, has a worsening Opioid crisis.

\n

- Punjab state government has taken various measures to enhance Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST).

\n

\n\n

### **What are Opioids?**

\n\n

\n

- Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription.

\n

- These drugs are chemically related and interact with opioid receptors on nerve cells in the body and brain.

\n

- Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time and as prescribed by a doctor.

\n

- As they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief they can be misused, when misused opioid pain relievers can lead to overdose incidents and deaths.

\n

\n\n

### **What measures were taken by Punjab to counter drug abuse?**

\n\n

\n

- It is estimated that Punjab has between 1.7 lakh and 2.7 lakh addicts.  
\n
- State government has promised to end the drug menace, through policing and by medical interventions.  
\n
- State government on pilot basis had introduced Buprenorphine-based Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT) programme.  
\n
- Buprenorphine is currently administered in four rehabilitation and 21 community health centres in the state.  
\n
- As of mid-January 2018, 1,712 new patients were registered in the three districts where the pilot is running, the patient retention rate currently stands at 82.13%.  
\n

\n\n

### **What is the role of Buprenorphine in OST?**

\n\n

- Opioid substitution therapy (OST) is the proper procedure for the treatment endorsed by WHO, Buprenorphine is one of the OST drug given on a long-term basis.  
\n
- The treatment involves doctor-administered doses of Buprenorphine under controlled circumstances.  
\n
- The drug can play a major role in rehabilitating addicts if used under medical supervision along with psychosocial interventions.  
\n
- In India Buprenorphine is a Schedule H drug and is available at government-recognised pharmacies only.  
\n

\n\n

### **What are the Risks involved with Buprenorphine?**

\n\n

- Patients may get addicted to Buprenorphine, and start consuming it in non-medical environments.  
\n

- If injected along with depressant drugs, this can even lead to death.  
\n
- In Punjab there was a boom in the demand for Buprenorphine as addicts found the drug to be an alternative.  
\n
- Private psychiatrists had started prescribing the drug in excessive quantity to addicts, and it was being sold as an alternative to heroin.  
\n

\n\n

### **What measures were taken to address misuse of OST drugs?**

\n\n

- Punjab government had ordered a high-profile crackdown on drug peddlers by placing restrictions on Buprenorphine.  
\n

\n\n

- The government issued orders to restrict its supply after there were reports of misuse and illegal sale.  
\n
- Its availability was restricted to government and private rehabilitation centres only.  
\n
- Buprenorphine is sold under strict regulations and cannot be purchased without the prescription of a qualified doctor.  
\n
- It is also listed as a psychotropic substance under The Narcotic Drugs Psychotropic Substances Act.  
\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: Indian Express**

\n