

Opioids

Information for Patients Who Lose Access to Care

OVERVIEW

Opioids are medications that depress the central nervous system to relax the body and relieve pain. Opioids are used to treat moderate to severe pain, but can come with serious risks such as tolerance, physical dependence, overdose, or substance use disorder. ¹

Common opioids are oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet), oxymorphone (Opana), hydrocodone (Vicodin), fentanyl, codeine, morphine (Kadian, Avinza), and methadone.

RISKS OF SUDDEN DISCONTINUATION

When a patient who has been treated with opioids suddenly stops taking their medication or takes less than they normally do, the patient may experience **withdrawal symptoms**.

Sudden discontinuation of opioids may lead to symptoms of withdrawal including:^{1, 2}

- Muscle or bone pain
- Sleep problems
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Cold flashes with goose bumps
- Uncontrollable leg movements or severe cravings
- Anxiety or irritability

Patients who lose access to their provider are encouraged to re-establish care as soon as possible. Visit bit.ly/patientadvocacyPA for tips on how to re-establish care.

In the case of a medical emergency, call 911 or go to a local Emergency Room immediately.

¹ [Prescription Opioids DrugFacts | NIDA](#)

² [Clinical Opioid Withdrawal Scale | NIDA](#)

³ [Naloxone Drug Facts | National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\) \(nih.gov\)](#)

⁴ [Fentanyl Facts - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

DANGERS OF COUNTERFEIT OPIOIDS

When a patient suddenly loses access to their provider, they may feel they have no other option but to turn to other sources to avoid withdrawal. There are serious risks associated with taking opioids from sources that do not require a prescription. These sources may provide counterfeit (fake) pills or substances containing hazardous ingredients like xylazine or fentanyl.

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is like morphine but is 50 to 100 times more potent.⁴ Fentanyl is a major contributor to overdose.⁴

RESOURCES

- Detoxification, or detox programs help patients safely manage the withdrawal process. To access these services, patients will first complete an assessment to determine the appropriate level of care. To access these services:
 - Call the number on the back of your health insurance card.
 - Visit treatmentatlas.org: **ATLAS** is an online search tool for patients who may need withdrawal management services or substance use disorder treatment.
 - Call the **Pennsylvania Get Help Now Helpline** (available 24/7): **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**
- **Naloxone is an easy-to-use, life-saving medication that reverses an opioid overdose by blocking the effects of opioids such as fentanyl, which could be present in fake pills.**
 - The Standing Order for naloxone allows anyone to get naloxone without a prescription from their local pharmacy, visit pa.gov/opioids for more information.
 - Naloxone is available for free through the mail, visit: nextdistro.org.
- If you do not have health insurance, you may consider seeing a community healthcare provider at a health center near you, visit: bit.ly/findacarecenter.
- The **National Suicide Crisis Lifeline** provides 24/7 free and private support to anyone. **Call by dialing 988 or text “HOME” to 741741** or visit 988lifeline.org
- The Patient Advocacy Program is a resource coordinator for patients prescribed controlled substance medications who lose access to care. Call **844-377-7367** (Monday-Friday, 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM) or email ra-dh-advocacy@pa.gov.