



# HOT TOPIC

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Updated text below in red

## **UPDATE:** EFFECTIVE FEB. 1, 2019: ADDITIONAL OPIOID MANAGEMENT MEASURES IMPLEMENTED — MORPHINE MILLIGRAM EQUIVALENTS LIMIT

### **APPLIES TO COMMERCIAL & HEALTHCARE REFORM MEMBERS ONLY**

The opioid epidemic is increasing in the United States in staggering numbers. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

- **Almost 218,000 people died** in the United States from overdoses related to prescription opioids. Overdose deaths involving prescription opioids were five times higher in 2017 than in 1999. <sup>1</sup>
- **46 people die every day** from overdoses involving prescription opioids. In 2017, prescription opioids continue to contribute to the epidemic in the U.S. – they were involved in **more than 35%** of all opioid overdose deaths. <sup>2</sup>

Like you, one of Highmark's main priorities is the safe, effective use of prescription drugs by our members who are your patients. Therefore, beginning February 1, 2019, **Highmark will implement a 90 morphine milligram equivalents (MME)/day limit for opioid-naïve patients and members' currently receiving less than 90 MME.**

This new program is based on the CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain:

"When opioids are started, clinicians should prescribe the lowest effective dosage. Clinicians should use caution when prescribing opioids at any dosage, should carefully reassess evidence of individual benefits and risks when considering increasing dosage to  $\geq 50$  morphine milligram equivalents (MME)/day, and should avoid increasing dosage to  $\geq 90$  MME/day or carefully justify a decision to titrate dosage to  $\geq 90$  MME/day." <sup>3</sup>

Pharmacy policy J-672 was created to support these measures. To view this policy, visit Highmark's Provider Resource Center, and select **Pharmacy Policy Search** from the top navigation bar.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

For further assistance, the following resources may aid in appropriate prescribing of prescription opioids:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/clinical-tools.html>
- JAMA: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2503508>

### ***In Pennsylvania:***

Pennsylvania's *Prescription Drug Monitoring Program* (PA PDMP) assists prescribing providers in identifying patients struggling with substance use disorder while offering access to expansive resources including:

- Prescriber Q & A
- PDMP Tutorials & Policies
- Provider Resources, including:
  - Opioid Prescribing Guidelines
  - Talking with Patients About Their Drug Use
  - Patient Education Materials
  - Identifying Red Flags for Addiction and Diversion
  - State Resources Available to You

Visit their website at: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Opioids/Pages/Opioids.aspx>.

### ***In Other States:***

For information to other states' PDMPs, please visit the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Training and Technical Assistance Center: <https://www.pdmpassist.org/>

We appreciate your support of our members who are your patients by taking action to ensure safe prescribing and use of opioid medications.

*Note: For your convenience, the Provider Resource Center contains helpful information on Pharmacy Authorization Submissions.*

~~*Note: For your convenience, NaviNet® can be used for any pharmacy authorization requests. It not only saves time, but it can also notify you if a duplicate request has already been received by Highmark and ensures that the patient is a Highmark member with active pharmacy benefits.*~~

<sup>1</sup> Wide-ranging online data for epidemiologic research (WONDER). Atlanta, GA: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics; 2016. Available at <http://wonder.cdc.gov>.

<sup>2</sup> Scholl L, Seth P, Kariisa M, Wilson N, Baldwin G. Drug and Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths – United States, 2013-2017 ([https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm675152e1.htm?s\\_cid=mm675152e1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm675152e1.htm?s_cid=mm675152e1_w)). Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. ePub: 21 December 2018

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/rr/rr6501e1er.htm>