

HOT TOPIC

Revised content is listed in red with removed content containing a strikethrough below.

EFFECTIVE MARCH 8, 2018: SHORT AND LONG ACTING OPIOID MANAGEMENT MEASURES IMPLEMENTED APPLIES TO COMMERCIAL MEMBERS ONLY

The opioid epidemic is increasing in the United States in staggering numbers. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in an Aug. 30, 2017 online article, "We now know that overdoses from prescription opioids are a driving factor in the 15-year increase in opioid overdose deaths." The CDC continued by stating, "From 2000 to 2015 more than half a million people died from drug overdoses. (And) ninety one Americans die every day from an opioid overdose." ¹

Like you, one of Highmark's main priorities is the safe, effective use of prescription drugs by our members, your patients. Therefore, beginning March 8, 2018, Highmark will implement opioid measures designed to assist in ensuring clinically appropriate use of opioids that will proactively prevent the development of opioid use disorder.

Both measures, listed below, follow CDC and Highmark guidelines. The measures will be effective March 8, 2018, for commercial members.

Opioid Implemented Measures:

- **Short-acting opioids:**
 - Initial prescriptions will be limited to seven days for patients new to a short-acting opioid therapy. No Prior Authorization Required.
 - Initial prescriptions greater than seven days will require [Prior Authorization](#).
 - Note: Patients can receive a maximum 14-day supply for short-acting opioids within a 30-day period without additional authorization, provided that each prescription does not exceed the 7-day limit.
 - Exceptions to these limits will be provided for members with **cancer or other terminal illnesses**. (Quantity level limits are based on CDC Guidelines.)
- ~~Short acting opioids: Initial prescriptions will be limited to seven days for patients new to therapy. [Prior Authorization](#) requirements apply. These patients will receive a maximum 14 day supply for short acting opioids within a 30 day period without additional authorization. There will be **exceptions** for members with **cancer or other terminal illnesses**. (Quantity level limits are based on CDC Guidelines.)~~
- **Long-acting opioids:** [Prior authorization](#) for new users will be required to initiate therapy. Prior authorization will require confirmation of diagnosis. (Quantity level limits for long-acting opioids have existed for many years, with **exceptions** for those who have **terminal illnesses**.)

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.

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>

Pennsylvania's new *Prescription Drug Monitoring Program* (PA PDMP) assists prescribing providers in identifying patients struggling with substance abuse 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:

<http://www.health.pa.gov/Your-Department-of-Health/Offices%20and%20Bureaus/PaPrescriptionDrugMonitoringProgram/Pages/Prescribers.aspx#>.

For your BlueCard Patients (providers out of state): Please visit the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws at: www.namsdl.org/prescription-monitoring-programs.cfm

We appreciate your support of our members, your patients, in the prescription of opioid medications.

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.

¹ www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html - Aug. 30, 2017