

# OPIOID POLICY UPDATES:

Health First Colorado  
(Colorado's Medicaid Program)

Health First Colorado has policies for prescribing opioids. The goal of these policies is to keep members safe. When a member is prescribed opioids, their doctor may need to ask for prior authorization from Health First Colorado.

- Prescriptions for high opioid dosages require prior authorization.
- New prescriptions for opioid and benzodiazepine combination therapy require prior authorization. Prior authorization will automatically be approved for members receiving palliative or hospice care and members with a diagnosis of seizure disorder or convulsions.
- Members who have not filled an opioid prescription in the last 180 days are able to receive a 7-day supply of short-acting opioid drugs. The fourth prescription for an opioid will require prior authorization.
- Dental prescription opioids are limited to short-acting opioid drugs with a 4-day supply limit and a maximum of 24 tablets or capsules. The fourth prescription for an opioid will require prior authorization.

Health care providers can answer questions members have about opioids and whether a member will need a prior authorization request.



## Opioids

Opioids are prescription drugs that are used to treat pain. Prescription opioids are a controlled substance.



## Risks related to opioid drugs

Opioid pain medication use has serious risks, including overdose and opioid use disorder. Patients prescribed higher opioid dosages are at a higher risk of overdose. Opioids are sometimes prescribed with another drug called a benzodiazepine. Both drugs interfere with breathing rate. When they are taken together, there is a higher risk of overdose death due to lack of oxygen in the body. Common benzodiazepines include Alprazolam (Xanax), Clonazepam (Klonopin) and Lorazepam (Ativan).



## Members who currently take a combination of an opioid and a benzodiazepine

Members who are currently taking an opioid and a benzodiazepine will continue to receive their medications.



## Opioid drug coverage and prior authorization requests

Prior authorization is a review process to decide whether prescriptions are appropriate for a member. Technicians, pharmacists and doctors who work for Health First Colorado review the request and make a decision based on established criteria and guidelines. Some members will need prior authorization. Some members will not. The member's health care provider will make the prior authorization request. Both the provider and the member will be told if the request is approved or denied.



## Continuing medications during the prior authorization process

The prior authorization process is completed in 24 hours. However, the process may take longer if Health First Colorado requires more information from the member's provider.

If a member needs a medication immediately, their pharmacy can fill a 3-day emergency prescription for medications that can be given in 3-day increments. The prior authorization will be processed during this 3-day period.



## Members who take benzodiazepine chronically and are prescribed an opioid

Members who take a benzodiazepine chronically will be able to fill a prescription for an opioid prescription with prior authorization.



## Members with opioid prescriptions over the allowable morphine milligram equivalents (MME) limit

Members who take benzodiazepine chronically will be able to fill a prescription for an opioid prescription with prior authorization.

## Common Opioids

### Long-Acting

- Fentanyl patches: 12mcg, 25mcg, 50mcg, 75mcg, 100mcg
- Methadone (Dolophine)
- Morphine ER (MS Contin)
- Tramadol ER (Ultram ER)

### Short-Acting

- Hydrocodone with acetaminophen (Lortab)
- Oxycodone immediate release tablet
- Morphine immediate release
- Tramadol immediate release (Ultram)

All of the above agents are preferred. For a full list of preferred agents, see the [preferred drug list \(PDL\)](#).

# Opioid Policies General Overview

## Opioids and Benzodiazepine combination prescribing

Effective September 15, 2019, new prescriptions for combination therapy require prior authorization. This policy does not affect current prescriptions for members taking a combination of an opioid and a benzodiazepine. Prior authorizations will automatically be approved for members receiving palliative or hospice care and members with a diagnosis of seizure disorder or convulsions. The combination opioid and benzodiazepine policy will not change other opioid policies. Members with opioid prescriptions over the allowable milligram morphine equivalent will still require prior authorization.

### Common benzodiazepines:

- Alprazolam (Xanax)
- Clonazepam (Klonopin)
- Lorazepam (Ativan)

### SUMMARY

New prescriptions for opioid and benzodiazepine combination therapy require prior authorization. Prior authorization will be automatically approved for members receiving palliative or hospice care and members with a diagnosis of seizure disorder or convulsions.

## Total morphine milligram equivalent policy

Effective October 1, 2017, the maximum allowable morphine equivalent (MME) is 200 MME. Prescriptions for short-acting and long-acting opioids are cumulatively included in this calculation. The prescriptions that exceeds the cumulative MME limit of 200 MME for a member will require prior authorization.

### SUMMARY

Prescriptions for high opioid dosages require prior authorization.

## Opioid naïve policy

Effective August 1, 2017, members whom have not filled a prescription for an opioid within the past 180 days will be identified as “opioid treatment naïve” and have limitations placed on the initial prescription(s). The prescriptions is limited to short-acting opioid agents only, with a 7-day supply limit and a quantity limit of 8 dosage forms per day (tablets, capsules). Maximum of #56 tablets/capsules for a 7-day supply. Limitations applies to the first 3 fills, the fourth prescription for an opioid will require a prior authorization.

### SUMMARY

Members who have not filled an opioid prescription in the last 180 days are only able to receive a 7-day supply of short-acting opioid drugs. The fourth prescription for an opioid will require prior authorization.

## Opioid policy for dental prescriptions

Effective November 15, 2018, Health First Colorado implemented the dental prescription opioid policy. The prescription is limited to short-acting opioid agents only, with a 4-day supply limit and a quantity limit of 6 dosage forms per day (tablets, capsules). Maximum of #24 tablets/capsules for a 4-day supply. Limitations applies to the first 3 fills, the fourth prescription for an opioid will require a prior authorization.

### SUMMARY

Dental prescription opioids are limited to short acting opioid drugs with a 4-day supply limit and a maximum of 24 tablets or capsules. The fourth prescription for an opioid will require prior authorization.

