

# Opioid Medicines in the Emergency Department: *Your Safety Comes First*

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*The purpose of this fact sheet is to help you understand Intermountain's policies around using opioid pain medicines in the Emergency Department — and our plan for keeping you safe.*

When you are in the Emergency Department our goal is to treat your problem as quickly and safely as possible. If you are in pain, you may be given opioid or non-opioid medicines to control it.

## What are opioid medicines?

**Opioids** (OH-pee-oidz) are prescription pain medicines that change the way your brain handles pain signals. They're sometimes called **narcotics**. Some examples are morphine (MS Contin), hydrocodone (Norco, Vicodin), oxycodone (Percocet), fentanyl, and methadone. Opioids can be pills, patches, or liquids.

Opioids are “controlled substances.” National and state laws require us to use these very carefully to keep you safe. Intermountain supports these laws.

## Opioid medicines have risks

Opioid pain medicines can lead to:

- **Tolerance.** You need more and more of the medicine to get the same effect.
- **Dependence.** You may have withdrawal symptoms if you suddenly stop taking it or reduce the dose.
- **Addiction.** You can't stop using it even if you want to. Addiction is a disease that can make long-lasting changes to how your brain processes rewards, motivation, and memory.
- **Overdose.** You took more than your body can handle. Or, the opioid interacted with other medicines, drugs, or alcohol. An opioid overdose can cause slowed breathing and sudden death.

**There may be other options to help control your pain.** These include strong versions of medicines that are not opioids, and can help reduce your risk.

## How we will keep you safe

- **The Emergency Department doctor may not prescribe opioid pain medicines if:**
    - There are other, safer ways to treat your pain.
    - Opioid pain medicine is not the best way to treat your overall condition. You may be given strong versions of non-opioid pain medicines instead. These have fewer risks.
    - You were sent to the Emergency Department by another doctor for pain medicine or anxiety medicine. You may be sent back to that doctor.
  - **If you are prescribed an opioid,** you may have to show a valid photo identification (ID). We are required to review medical and state records to be sure we are prescribing these medicines safely. **Giving false information in order to get a controlled substance is a crime.**
  - **The Emergency Department will not refill prescriptions** for opioids that were lost or stolen. They also will not refill opioids prescribed by a doctor not in the Emergency Department.
  - **If you are given an opioid or any other medicine that can make you sleepy:**
    - You must stay in the Emergency Department until we're sure you are safe to go home. This is usually about an hour after you take the medicine.
    - You will need to arrange for a responsible adult to drive you home.
- Emergency Department doctors are not allowed to call in prescriptions for opioids or other controlled substances to a pharmacy.**

## If you have chronic (long-term) pain

Emergency Department doctors are not specialists in treating chronic pain. Most do not prescribe long-acting medicines such as methadone, OxyContin, MS Contin, fentanyl patches, or Suboxone.

**The Emergency Department doctor may not give you a prescription for pain medicine to take home if:**

- You already see a pain specialist.
- You have visited the Emergency Department many times without going to a regular doctor.

You may be asked to visit your pain specialist or regular doctor instead.

## How to get help

**Visit our care management team for help with:**

- Finding a regular doctor
- Making a plan to manage chronic pain or anxiety
- Making a plan to manage dependence or addiction

You can contact them at: \_\_\_\_\_

**Controlled substances** are medicines and drugs that have strict laws around them to protect your safety. Opioids are a kind of controlled substance. Examples of controlled substances include:

buprenorphine	methylphenidate
butorphanol	dextroamphetamine
nalbuphine	methadone
carisoprodol	levorphanol
codeine	Suboxone
hydrocodone	pentazocine
oxycodone	butalbital and all other barbiturates
hydromorphone	diazepam
oxymorphone	clonazepam
morphine	lorazepam and all other benzodiazepines
meperidine	
tramadol	
fentanyl	

Common pill names include: Norco, Lortab, Percocet, Vicodin, and Dilaudid.

Overdose deaths related to opioid medicine is a growing problem the country. In Utah, there are now more deaths from prescription medicine overdoses than from motor vehicle crashes.

**If you feel you need help** with dependence, addiction, chronic pain, or chronic anxiety, please tell your doctor or nurse. They can refer you to someone who can help.

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