

Opioid Medication Coverage FAQ for Commercial Providers



Overview

Since 2000, there has been a dramatic rise in overdose deaths and hospitalization across the nation. This has paralleled with an increase in the prescription of opioids for pain.

CDC guidelines indicate clinical studies have consistently found that higher doses of long-term opioids are associated with risk for overdose or death. The Oregon Health Authority and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have lowered their recommended daily morphine milligram equivalents (MME). In light of these recommendations, PacificSource initiated 90 MME point-of-sale safety edits in May 2022.

Doses exceeding the values listed below will require prior authorization or an exception request submitted via InTouch with a taper plan.

What was the timeline for the changes to the formulary?

The table below includes the changes we initiated to our opioid coverage for commercial members.

	Targeted MME Threshold (requiring prior authorization)	Effective Date
Total Opioid Use	≥ 300 MME per day	August 22, 2020
	≥ 250 MME per day	November 22, 2020
	≥ 200 MME per day	February 22, 2021
	≥ 150 MME per day	May 22, 2021
	≥ 120 MME per day	August 22, 2021
	≥ 110 MME per day	November 22, 2021
	≥ 100 MME per day	February 22, 2022
	≥ 90 MME per day	May 22, 2022

Who does this change affect?

These formulary changes apply to all commercial PacificSource members who are currently taking opioid medications, as well as those who may be prescribed opioids in the future.

Who may be exempt from this program?

Patients prescribed opioids for:

- Pain related to current active cancer
- Chronic pain related to sickle cell disease
- Pain related to hospice care
- Acute pain management (such as recent trauma or surgery) allows short-term approval only

Proper documentation is required for approval.

What are morphine milligram equivalents (MME)?

Morphine milligram equivalents (MME) can also be referred to as morphine equivalent doses (MED). Our language has changed to favor the use of MME. Individual opioid products have different potencies or strengths, which makes it challenging to quantify the amount of opioids an individual patient takes when compared to other opioid products. This becomes especially difficult for patients taking multiple opioid products in the same day. MME is used to standardize the total dose of opioids received in a 24-hour period.

How is MME calculated?

Pharmacy Services will calculate daily MME for patients based on claims data and standard equivalency factors published for individual opioids.

Why did PacificSource move toward a 90-MME target?

As the number of MMEs a patient takes increases, so does their risk of overdose. Studies have found that compared to patients taking 1 to <20 MME/day, patients on ≥100 MME/day are 2.0 to 8.9 times more likely to overdose.*

The 2022 CDC Clinical Practice Guidelines for prescribing opioids for pain recommend prescribers to carefully consider the benefits versus risks before increasing total opioid dosage to ≥50 MME/day. Dosage increases to >50 MME/day are unlikely to provide substantially improved pain control for most patients while overdose risk increases with dosage. If a patient's opioid dosage for all sources of opioids combined reaches or exceeds 50 MME/day, prescribers should implement additional precautions, such as: increased frequency of follow-ups, prescribing naloxone, and providing opioid overdose prevention education to both the patient and the patient's household members. The guidelines also remind prescribers that additional dosage increases beyond 50 MME/day are progressively more likely to yield diminishing returns in benefits for pain and function relative to risks to patients.*

*CDC Clinical Practice Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Pain - United States, 2022. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 3 Nov. 2022, [CDC.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/rr/rr7103a1.htm?s_cid=rr7103a1_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/rr/rr7103a1.htm?s_cid=rr7103a1_w).

Who should I contact if I have additional questions?

Our Pharmacy Services team is happy to help.

Call: **844-877-4803**, TTY:711. We accept all relay calls.

Email: Pharmacy@PacificSource.com