

Opioid prescriptions and the opioid crisis

Our country is experiencing an opioid crisis. Opioids are “chemical cousins” of heroin, and they are highly addictive. More than 90 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose.

Studies suggest the risk of ongoing opioid use rises dramatically with longer initial prescriptions. Every day of use and every refill increases the risk. When patients are prescribed more pills than they need for pain relief, leftover pills can be misused or sold.

Why an opioid policy?

The Uniform Medical Plan (UMP) opioid clinical policy is a tool to combat the crisis by preventing addiction and keeping members safe.

The policy limits the number of pills that UMP will cover for members:

- **Age 20 or younger:** 18 pills or 90 milliliters of liquid (about a three-day supply)
- **Age 21 or older:** 42 pills or 210 milliliters of liquid (about a week’s supply)

For long-term use, the new UMP policy requires that providers follow standards to use these medications as safely as possible.

Are there exceptions to the policy?

These opioid prescription limits **do not apply** to members who are:

- Already receiving ongoing opioids therapy.
- Receiving cancer treatment.
- In hospice care, palliative care, or end-of-life care.

When does this change happen?

The opioid policy limits apply to prescriptions filled on or after January 2, 2018.

What do I need to do?

Nothing. Most of the time, the safest and most effective supply of opioids will be below the opioid policy limits. If your provider decides you need more, he or she can follow a simple process to get the amount needed to treat your condition.

Which drugs does the policy cover?

- Butorphanol
- Codeine
- Fentanyl
- Hydrocodone
- Hydromorphone
- Levorphanol
- Meperidine
- Morphine
- Oxycodone
- Oxymorphone
- Pentazocine
- Tapentadol
- Tramadol

Why can adults get more pills than kids?

Children and adolescents are some of the most vulnerable populations when it comes to opioid use. Often they first receive opioids after a dental procedure or a sprained ankle. The lower limit will provide pain relief while protecting their still-developing brains from longer exposure to addictive medications. Children also heal faster than adults.

Want to know more?

Call Washington State Rx Services Customer Service at 1-888-361-1611 (TRS: 711) for more information.

You can read the UMP opioid clinical policy by visiting regence.com/ump and clicking on “Find forms.”

UMP is administered by Regence BlueShield and Washington State Rx Services under contract with the Washington State Health Care Authority.

HCA is committed to providing equal access to our services. If you need an accommodation, or require documents in another format, please contact the following.

Employees: Your personnel, payroll, or benefits office.

Retirees and PEBB Continuation Coverage members: The Health Care Authority at 1-800-200-1004 (TRS: 711).