

New Medicare Opioid Programs for 2019

What are opioids?

Opioids are a class of drugs that include a number of prescription pain relievers, such as oxycodone (OxyContin[®]), hydrocodone (Vicodin[®]), codeine, morphine, and many others. These medications can help with certain types of pain, but can also have serious risks like addiction, overdose and death.

These risks are increased when opioids are:

- obtained from multiple doctors or pharmacies
- taken along with certain other medications like benzodiazepines (commonly used for anxiety and sleep)

As a result, we have several new safety measures that will start on January 1, 2019. These are intended to help prevent opioid overuse and ensure your safety. If we find that your use of prescription opioids is not safe, we may limit your access to them or to other medications like benzodiazepines.

What is new?

Pharmacy alerts

There are new alerts that may be triggered at the pharmacy when you go to fill an opioid prescription. These alerts call the pharmacist's attention to potential concerns around opioid usage. This could be prescriptions that overlap one another or high doses of these medications. An alert will also generate if you are new to opioid use (or have not had any opioid prescriptions filled in the past 90 days), and will limit the amount you can get to a maximum of 7 days' worth of medication. Your copayment for the 7-day supply will be prorated based on your 30-day supply copayment. For example, if your copayment for a 30-day supply is \$30.00, the copayment for the 7-day supply would be \$7.00.

Clinical program

In addition, Fallon Health has a program aimed at identifying members who may be at risk for opioid overuse. We do this by looking at pharmacy records – what has been filled, how often, what the dosage is, etc. Members with high opioid doses from multiple prescribers and/or being filled at multiple pharmacies may be identified for this program. When that happens, we will reach out to the member's provider(s) to discuss our concerns. However, provider(s) have the final say in whether the doses are safe and needed for a particular member.

Is anyone exempt from these alerts and programs?

If you are in long-term care (LTC), on hospice, receiving palliative care, or are being treated for active cancer pain, these alerts and programs do not apply to you. Also, drugs like Suboxone and others used to treat opioid addiction are not included.

How will these alerts and programs affect me?

These particular safety measures will only apply to people who use opioids.

Some of the pharmacy alerts can be handled by the pharmacist when you fill your prescription, by reviewing your drug history or contacting your provider. In some cases though, your provider will need to send some clinical information to Fallon for review. This is called requesting a Coverage Determination or an Exception, and will determine whether the drugs and doses are safe and needed for you.

If you are identified by our clinical program as being at risk for opioid overuse, we will contact your provider. If your provider believes that the doses are *not* safe and needed, you could be limited to using only one provider to write your opioid prescriptions and/or one pharmacy to fill your opioid prescriptions. You also may be limited to specific drugs and doses. If any of these occur, you will be notified in advance, and you will have the right to appeal our decision.

Note that if you are considered to be at risk of opioid overuse, Medicare may limit your ability to change plans during special enrollment periods. We will notify you if this applies to you.

Questions?

If you have any questions, please call Customer Service at 1-800-325-5669 (TRS 711), 8 a.m.–8 p.m., Monday–Friday. (Oct. 1–March 31, seven days a week.)

Fallon Health is an HMO/HMO-POS plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in Fallon Health depends on contract renewal.

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