

HHS eases requirements for use of buprenorphine to treat opioid use disorder

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Carla Kemp, Senior Editor

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released [new practice guidelines](#) today that will allow physicians and other health care professionals to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder without going through a training course and obtaining a waiver.

The new guidelines aim to expand access to treatment for opioid use disorder, which has skyrocketed during the pandemic.

From September 2019 to September 2020, an [estimated 90,000 people in the U.S. died from drug overdoses](#), the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period, according to provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Increases in overdose deaths emphasize the need to expand access to evidence-based treatments, including buprenorphine that can be prescribed in office-based settings,” Assistant Secretary for Health Rachel L. Levine, M.D., FAAP, said in a [news release](#). “These guidelines provide another tool to help communities respond to the evolving overdose crisis, equipping providers to save lives in their communities.”

The guidelines allow physicians who are state licensed and registered by the Drug Enforcement Administration to prescribe controlled substances to treat up to 30 patients with buprenorphine. They no longer have to meet requirements related to training, counseling and psychosocial services that were needed to obtain a waiver.

Similar guidelines were issued in the waning days of the Trump administration, but they were rescinded after President Biden took office.

The Food and Drug Administration approved the use of buprenorphine, a partial opioid agonist, in patients 16 years and older in 2002. Physicians could prescribe the medication in general medical settings but first had to complete eight hours of training and apply for a waiver.

In 2016, the AAP published a [policy statement](#) that encouraged pediatricians to offer medication for the treatment of opioid use disorder in adolescents and young adults. The AAP also has supported changes to make it easier to prescribe buprenorphine and endorsed a bill in 2020 that would have eliminated the need for a waiver.

The new guidelines encourage health care professionals to obtain education related to caring for patients with opioid use disorder using the [Buprenorphine Quick Start Guide](#).

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