

What You Need To Know About Maine's New Opioid Prescribing Law

For people living with chronic pain, opioid pain relievers (such as morphine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone) have frequently been prescribed in the past to help decrease pain. However, as more has become known about the dangers and long-term effects of these medications, many states have increased their regulation of opioid pain relievers.

In Maine, Governor LePage signed into law "*An Act to Prevent Opiate Abuse by Strengthening the Controlled Substances Prescription Monitoring Program*" in the spring of 2016. Several changes to opioid prescribing will occur in Maine as a result of this new law. Understanding these changes may help to reduce anxiety for people who use opioid medications to manage their chronic pain.

1) Some people already taking opioids for chronic pain will be asked to work closely with their doctor to slowly decrease their dose of medication.

If your dose of an opioid pain reliever is over of 100 milligrams of morphine daily, or an equivalent dose of other opioid medications, you could potentially benefit from decreasing the dosage of your opioid medications. Your doctor or health care provider may work with you to develop a "tapering plan" to reduce your dose to this limit by July 2017, as required by law. They will work with you to help manage your chronic pain, and you should not experience significant side effects when opioid medications are tapered slowly. Ask your health care provider if you may need to decrease your dose, and then work with your provider to make a plan that is right for you.

2) People taking opioids for chronic pain may be asked to come to their doctor's office more frequently for visits or other types of monitoring tools.

Due to the safety concerns and the risk of addiction, most health care providers closely monitor their patients who are taking opioid medications with regular office visits, prescribing agreements, and tools such as urine tests. Because of heightened concerns about the safety of opioid medications, you may find that your doctor's office increases their monitoring of these medications in the future.

There is also data to show that close to 30% of people prescribed opioid pain medications on a chronic basis will develop an addiction to these medications, called "Opioid Use Disorder". Your provider will be evaluating you for signs or symptoms of undesirable effects from opioids, as well as monitoring for potential addiction so that they can help you stay safe and treat this disorder if it develops.

3) Doctors will be monitoring a database called the "Prescription Monitoring Program" when they write prescriptions for opioid pain relievers.

The Prescription Monitoring Program is a statewide database in Maine that allows doctors to see when their patient has filled prescriptions for opioid pain relievers in the past. Doctors and other health care providers in Maine are also required to use this database when they write a prescription for "benzodiazepines" such as Valium, Xanax, or Klonopin because these medications can increase the risk of unintentional overdose when taken with opioid pain relievers. Using a Prescription Monitoring Program helps doctors understand if a person may be at risk for unintentional overdose or Opioid Use Disorder.