

## MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT (MAT) - DEA LETTER TO PRESCRIBERS GIVES OK TO CONDUCT MEDICAL EVALUATION FOR START OF TREATMENT VIA TELEPHONE

Normally an Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) must conduct an in-person medical evaluation of a patient before prescribing or directly dispensing controlled substances, including buprenorphine; but the Covid-19 health emergency has caused regulating bodies to modify this requirement.

On March 31, 2020, the DEA issued a letter to prescribers following guidance being issued by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to exempt OTPs from the requirement to conduct an in-person evaluation for any patient who will be treated by the OTP with buprenorphine *if* a program physician, primary care physician, or an authorized healthcare professional under the supervision of a program physician determines that an adequate evaluation can be conducted via telephone. The DEA cautioned that under normal circumstances, the agency would not consider the initiation of treatment with a controlled substance to be within the framework of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) due to the high risk of diversion. However, in light of the extraordinary circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the DEA has stated that DATA-waived practitioners (practitioners who have met SAMHSA qualifications and obtained authorization from DEA to dispense buprenorphine for maintenance or detoxification treatment) may prescribe buprenorphine to new patients for maintenance treatment or detoxification following a telephone evaluation.

The DEA has specifically stated that this guidance does *not* apply to *new* OTP patients treated with methadone. For these patients, the in-person medical evaluation will remain in place. However, a practitioner in an OTP may continue to treat an *existing* OTP patient using methadone via telehealth, including use of a telephone, in accordance with SAMHSA's OTP guidance issued on March 16, 2020.

### Helpful Links:

DEA Covid-19 Information Page Click [here](#).

FAQs: Provision of methadone and buprenorphine for the treatment of Opioid Use Disorder in the COVID-19 emergency. Click [here](#).

### Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)

DEA Policy: Click [here](#).

DEA Guidance: Exemption Allowing Alternate Delivery Methods for OTPs. Click [here](#).

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): OTP Update Page. Click [here](#).

SAMHSA: COVID-19 Guidance for Opioid Treatment Programs. Click [here](#).

DEA Guidance: Methadone Shortages. Click [here](#).

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