

Opioid Alert!



**ANYONE WHO TAKES
PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS CAN
BECOME ADDICTED TO THEM.
ONCE ADDICTED, IT CAN BE
HARD TO STOP.**

The Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) Federal Employee's Program is instituting greater scrutiny on the prescription and utilization of opioid medication and pursuing an educational campaign to inform injured federal workers of the health and safety concerns relating to opioids.

Consider the Risk Prolonged use can lead to addiction. Opioid use often begins with treatment of acute pain. Alternatives should be considered, but if opioids are used, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that the lowest effective dose of immediate-release opioids should be used for the shortest duration possible, usually 3 days, finding that more than 7 days will rarely be needed:

https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/Guidelines_Factsheet-a.pdf

If you do take an opioid, know your Morphine Equivalent Dose (MED). You should discuss and carefully reassess benefits and risks with your physician especially when considering increasing dosage to greater than 50 MED per day. The higher the dose the greater the risk of misuse and overdose.

Consider the Alternatives Talk with your physician about ways to manage your pain that do not involve opioids. Some of these options may actually work better and have fewer risks and side effects. Depending on the type of pain you are experiencing, options may include acetaminophen, NSAIDs, antidepressants, anticonvulsants, exercise and physical therapy, and interventional therapy (injections).

Consider the Outcome In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of prescription opioids for the treatment of chronic pain, despite serious risks and the lack of evidence about their long-term effectiveness. Moreover, even when taken as directed, you may build up a tolerance – meaning you might need to take more of a medication for the same pain relief.

Opioids may actually result in longer periods of disability. Using data from 28 states from 2008-2013, the Workers Compensation Research Institute reports that workers that received any opioid prescription had a 42.9% longer duration of temporary disability than those without an opioid prescription. This is an average increase of approximately 4.8 weeks. This is even after controlling for worker and workplace characteristics, location characteristics, surgery, and severity of the injuries. In addition, the more opioid prescriptions received the greater chance for longer periods of disability and increased risk of addiction, misuse, and overdose.

<https://www.wcrinet.org/news/longer-term-opioid-prescribing-increases-time-away-from-work-for-injured-wo>
<https://www.bmj.com/content/360/bmj.j5790>

Learn More

OWCP encourages all injured workers to use publicly available resources to learn more about opioids and speak with their physicians about any concerns regarding their medical care. For educational information and resources pertaining to opioids, and to view our framework to reduce the potential for opioid misuse and addiction among injured federal workers, we encourage you to visit:

<https://www.dol.gov/owcp/dfec/opioidactionplan.htm>