



MEDICAL BOARD OF CALIFORNIA

Protecting consumers by advancing high quality, safe medical care.

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Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California | Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency | Department of Consumer Affairs

TO: Acute Care Hospital Administrators and Prescriber Licensees
Practicing Medicine in Acute Care Hospitals
FROM: Medical Board of California
DATE: December 8, 2025
SUBJECT: **Dispensing Opioid Treatments to Initiate Maintenance or
Detoxification Treatment Under The Federal Three Day Rule ([21
CFR § 1306.07\(b\)](#))**

This notice is to inform you of an important federal rule that may apply when arranging to refer a patient to a narcotic treatment program for opioid use disorder (OUD).

[Business and Professions Code section 750](#) requires the Medical Board of California (Board) to post online and annually disseminate this informational material to licensees authorized to write or issue controlled substance prescriptions pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 11150. The Board must also disseminate this information to acute care hospitals and post it to the [Board's website](#).

“Three Day Rule” for Opioid Use Disorder Treatment

Under federal and state law ([21 CFR §1306.07\(b\)](#) and [Health & Saf. Code, § 11158](#)), authorized practitioners who are not specifically registered with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration to conduct a narcotic treatment program (NTP) may dispense on an emergency basis Schedule II narcotic medication (e.g., methadone) to patients for the purpose of initiating maintenance treatment or detoxification treatment (or both).

Key Requirements of the Rule:

- Practitioners may dispense up to a three-day supply of Schedule II narcotic medication while referral to opioid treatment is being arranged.
- Not more than a three-day supply may be dispensed to one person for one person's use. This emergency treatment may not be renewed or extended.
- The rule is intended as a short-term emergency bridge until the patient can be admitted to a licensed NTP.

The Three Day Rule represents one pathway for practitioners to dispense Schedule II medications to initiate treatment for OUD. For more information about the Three Day Rule and other pathways to treat OUD, see the Additional Resources section at the bottom of this notice.

For questions about this notice, contact the [Board](#).

For more information about licensed narcotic treatment programs, review the online [provider directory](#) or contact the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), Licensing and Certification Division, Counselor and Medication Assisted Treatment Section at:

Website: [DHCS Licensing and Certification](#)

Email: DHCSNTP@dhcs.ca.gov

Phone: (916) 322-6682

Additional Resources

[DEA Guidance on Development of Revised Three Day Rule \(Jan. 12, 2023\)](#)

[DEA Notice of Final Rule, Dispensing of Narcotic Drugs to Relieve Acute Withdrawal Symptoms of Opioid Use Disorder \(Aug. 8, 2023\)](#)

[DEA Practitioner's Manual, An Informational Outline of the Controlled Substances Act \(Rev. 2023\)](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Federal Guidelines for Opioid Treatment Programs \(Fall 2024\)](#)

[California Department of Public Health, Substance and Addiction Prevention Branch, Resources: Health Care Providers](#)

[Medical Board of California, Guidelines for Prescribing Controlled Substances for Pain \(July 2023\)](#)