



# 5.70.041

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| <b>Section:</b>    | Prescription Drugs         | <b>Effective Date:</b>       | April 1, 2024 |
| <b>Subsection:</b> | Analgesics and Anesthetics | <b>Original Policy Date:</b> | May 22, 2015  |
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**Last Review Date:** March 8, 2024

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## Methadone

### Description

Dolophine (methadone oral tablets), Methadone Hydrochloride Intensol (methadone oral concentrate), Methadose Oral Concentrate (methadone oral concentrate), Methadose Dispersible Tablets (tablets for oral suspension)

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### Background

Methadone hydrochloride is a long-acting opioid agonist at mu-opioid receptors that is used to manage pain that requires long-term, daily opioid treatment when other pain treatments do not manage pain sufficiently or are not tolerated. It is also used for detoxification and maintenance treatment of opioid addiction, such as heroin or other morphine-like drugs, as part of a comprehensive plan that includes appropriate medical and social services. Methadone used to treat opioid addiction must only be dispensed by Opioid Treatment Programs approved by state authority and certified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and registered by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Methadone must be used in accordance with the treatment requirements stipulated in the Federal Opioid Treatment Standards (1-5).

**Maximum daily limit of methadone without a PA is 90 MME/day. Maximum daily limit of methadone with a PA is 200 MME/day.**

### Regulatory Status

FDA-approved indications: Methadone oral tablets (Methadose, Dolophine), methadone oral solution, methadone oral concentrate (Methadone Intensol Oral Concentrate) and methadone tablets for oral suspension are indicated for the following (1-3):

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1. Management of pain severe enough to require daily, around-the clock, long-term opioid treatment and for which alternative treatment options are inadequate.

Limitations of Use

- a. Because of the risks of addiction, abuse, and misuse with opioids, even at recommended doses, and because of the greater risks of overdose and death with long-acting opioids, reserve methadone hydrochloride tablets, oral solution and oral concentrate for use in patients for whom alternative treatment options (e.g., non-opioid analgesics or immediate-release opioids) are ineffective, not tolerated, or would be otherwise inadequate to provide sufficient management of pain.
  - b. Methadone hydrochloride tablets, oral solution, and oral concentrate are not indicated as an as needed (prn) analgesic.
2. Detoxification treatment of opioid addiction (heroin or other morphine-like drugs).
  3. Maintenance treatment of opioid addiction (heroin or other morphine-like drugs), in conjunction with appropriate social and medical services.

Methadose Dispersible tablets and Methadose Oral Concentrate are indicated for the following (4-5):

1. Detoxification treatment of opioid addiction (heroin or other morphine-like drugs).
2. Maintenance treatment of opioid addiction (heroin or other morphine-like drugs), in conjunction with appropriate social and medical services.

Methadone tablets, oral solution, and oral concentrate include a boxed warning for the following (1-5):

1. Respiratory depression is the chief hazard of opioid agonists, including morphine sulfate, which if not immediately recognized and treated, may lead to respiratory arrest and death. To reduce the risk of respiratory depression, proper dosing, titration, and monitoring are essential.
2. All patients treated with opioids require careful monitoring for signs of abuse, misuse, and addiction, since use of opioid analgesic products carries the risk of addiction even under appropriate medical use. The risk for opioid abuse increases in patients with a personal or family history of substance abuse or mental illness. Patients should be assessed for the risk of developing abuse prior to the start of treatment and should be routinely monitored during therapy.
3. Prolonged use of opioid agonists during pregnancy can result in neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome, which may be life-threatening.
4. Treatment with methadone may cause serious arrhythmia (torsades de pointes) and QT interval prolongation. Closely monitor patients for changes in cardiac rhythm during

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initiation and titration of methadone hydrochloride tablets, oral solution, and oral concentrate.

5. When used to treat opioid addiction through detoxification or maintenance programs, methadone may only be dispensed by certified opioid treatment programs certified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and approved by the designated state authority. Certified treatment programs shall dispense and use methadone in oral form only and according to the treatment requirements stipulated in the Federal Opioid Treatment Standards (42 CFR 8.12).

Methadone is contraindicated in patients who have significant respiratory depression, paralytic ileus, acute or severe bronchial asthma and hypersensitivity to any of its components or the active ingredient, methadone (1-5).

As with other opioids, physical dependence, respiratory depression, and overdose may also occur; hence monitoring and frequent patient evaluation should be used as part of an overall treatment plan (1-5).

The FDA requires healthcare providers to go through the Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) program before prescribing methadone tablets, oral solution, or oral concentrate that are indicated for use as analgesics (6).

As of January 1, 2008, manufacturers of methadone hydrochloride tablets 40mg (dispersible) have voluntarily agreed to restrict distribution of this formulation to only those facilities authorized for detoxification and maintenance treatment of opioid addiction, and hospitals (7).

Methadone is a long-acting opioid whose duration of analgesic action (typically 4 to 8 hours) approximates that of morphine and has an elimination half-life that is substantially longer (typically 8 to 59 hours). Methadone's pharmacokinetic properties, coupled with high inter-patient variability in its absorption, metabolism, and relative analgesic potency necessitate a cautious and highly individualized approach to prescribing. The complexities associated with methadone dosing can contribute to cases of iatrogenic overdose, particularly during treatment initiation and dose titration. Studies indicate that methadone-related fatalities were primarily related to respiratory depression during initial treatment along with poly-substance use (8-11).

CDC guidelines find that concurrent use of benzodiazepines and opioids might put patients at greater risk for potentially fatal overdose. Three studies of fatal overdose deaths found evidence of concurrent benzodiazepine use in 31%–61% of decedents (9). The FDA also states that benzodiazepines “are also commonly abused and misused, often together with opioid pain relievers and other medicines” (13).

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CDC guidelines finds that given uncertain benefits and substantial risks that opioids should not be considered first-line or routine therapy for chronic pain (i.e., pain continuing or expected to continue longer than 3 months or past the time of normal tissue healing) outside of active cancer, palliative, and end-of-life care (9).

FDA warns that opioids can interact with antidepressants and migraine medicines to cause a serious central nervous system reaction called serotonin syndrome, in which high levels of the chemical serotonin build up in the brain and cause toxicity (see Appendix 1 for list of drugs) (10).

The FDA has determined that a REMS is necessary for all opioid analgesics intended for outpatient use to ensure that the benefits of these drugs continue to outweigh the risks. The Opioid Analgesic REMS is a strategy to reduce the risk of abuse, misuse, addiction, overdose, and deaths due to prescription opioid analgesics. Prescribers should counsel patients and caregivers about the use of naloxone for opioid overdose and consider prescribing naloxone if clinically indicated (12).

The safety and effectiveness of methadone hydrochloride in pediatric patients below the age of 18 have not been established (1-5).

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### Related policies

Abstral, Actiq, Buprenorphine and Methadone Powders, Fentanyl Powder, Fentora, Opioid Drugs, Suboxone Drug Class, Subsys

### Policy

*This policy statement applies to clinical review performed for pre-service (Prior Approval, Precertification, Advanced Benefit Determination, etc.) and/or post-service claims.*

Methadone may be considered **medically necessary** if the conditions indicated below are met.

Methadone may be considered **investigational** for all other indications.

### Prior-Approval Requirements

***Prior authorization is not required if prescribed by an oncologist and/or the member has paid pharmacy claims for an oncology medication(s) in the past 6 months***

### Diagnoses

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Patient must have **ONE** of the following:

1. Pain associated with cancer
  2. Pain associated with sickle cell disease
  3. Treatment associated with hospice, palliative, or end-of-life care
- 

**Age** 18 years of age or older

## Diagnoses

Patient must have **ONE** of the following:

1. Pain

**AND ALL** of the following:

- a. Alternative treatment options have been ineffective, not tolerated, or inadequate for controlling the pain (i.e., non-opioid analgesics and other immediate release opioids)
- b. Prescriber agrees to assess the benefits of pain control (i.e., care plan, signs of abuse, severity of pain) after 3 months of therapy
- c. Prescriber agrees to evaluate the patient's response to therapy before changing dose
- d. Prescriber agrees to assess patient for signs and symptoms of serotonin syndrome
- e. Prescriber agrees to participate in the Opioid Analgesic REMS program and to monitor for abuse, misuse, addiction, and overdose and discontinue if necessary (<https://opioidanalgesicrems.com>)
- f. **NO** dual therapy with other opioids
- g. **NO** dual therapy with opioid addiction treatment
- h. **NO** dual therapy with an anti-anxiety benzodiazepine(s)
  - i. Alprazolam (Xanax)
  - ii. Clonazepam (Klonopin)
  - iii. Diazepam (Valium)
  - iv. Lorazepam (Ativan)
  - v. Oxazepam (Serax)
  - vi. Chlordiazepoxide (Librium)
  - vii. Clorazepate dipotassium (Tranxene)
- i. **NO** morphine milligram equivalent (MME) over 200 MME/day (e.g., <https://www.mdcalc.com/morphine-milligram-equivalents-mme-calculator>, [https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating\\_total\\_daily\\_dose-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating_total_daily_dose-a.pdf), <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/providers/prescribing/app.html>)

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2. Opioid addiction

**AND ONE** of the following:

- a. Opioid addiction requiring detoxification treatment
- b. Opioid addiction requiring maintenance treatment in conjunction with appropriate social and medical services

**AND ALL** of the following:

- a. Patient will be monitored during therapy for signs and symptoms of abuse/misuse as well as compliance and the potential diversion to others
- b. Patient is **NOT** taking **exclusively** for pain control
- c. **NO** dual therapy with other opioids
- d. **NO** dual therapy with another medication for opioid addiction
- e. **NO** morphine milligram equivalent (MME) over 200 MME/day  
(e.g., <https://www.mdcalc.com/morphine-milligram-equivalents-mme-calculator>,  
[https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating\\_total\\_daily\\_dose-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating_total_daily_dose-a.pdf),  
<https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/providers/prescribing/app.html>)

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## Prior – Approval *Renewal* Requirements

***Prior authorization is not required if prescribed by an oncologist and/or the member has paid pharmacy claims for an oncology medication(s) in the past 6 months***

### Diagnoses

Patient must have **ONE** of the following:

1. Pain associated with cancer
2. Pain associated with sickle cell disease
3. Treatment associated with hospice, palliative, or end-of-life care

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**Age** 18 years of age or older

### Diagnoses

Patient must have **ONE** of the following:

1. Pain

**AND ALL** of the following:

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- a. Prescriber agrees to continue to assess the benefits of pain control (i.e., care plan, signs of abuse, severity of pain) after 3 months of therapy
- b. Prescriber agrees to evaluate patient's response to therapy before changing dose
- c. Prescriber agrees to assess patient for signs and symptoms of serotonin syndrome
- d. Prescriber agrees to participate in the Opioid Analgesic REMS program and to monitor for abuse, misuse, addiction, and overdose and discontinue if necessary (<https://opioidanalgesicrems.com>)
- e. **NO** dual therapy with other opioids
- f. **NO** dual therapy with opioid addiction treatment
- g. **NO** dual therapy with an anti-anxiety benzodiazepine(s)
  - i. Alprazolam (Xanax)
  - ii. Clonazepam (Klonopin)
  - iii. Diazepam (Valium)
  - iv. Lorazepam (Ativan)
  - v. Oxazepam (Serax)
  - vi. Chlordiazepoxide (Librium)
  - vii. Clorazepate dipotassium (Tranxene)
- h. **NO** morphine milligram equivalent (MME) over 200 MME/day (e.g., <https://www.mdcalc.com/morphine-milligram-equivalents-mme-calculator>, [https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating\\_total\\_daily\\_dose-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating_total_daily_dose-a.pdf), <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/providers/prescribing/app.html>)

## 2. Opioid addiction

### **AND ALL** of the following:

- a. Opioid addiction requiring maintenance treatment in conjunction with appropriate social and medical services
- b. Patient is **NOT** taking exclusively for pain control
- c. **NO** dual therapy with other opioids
- d. **NO** dual therapy with another medication for opioid addiction
- e. **NO** morphine milligram equivalent (MME) over 200 MME/day (e.g., <https://www.mdcalc.com/morphine-milligram-equivalents-mme-calculator>, [https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating\\_total\\_daily\\_dose-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/calculating_total_daily_dose-a.pdf), <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/providers/prescribing/app.html>)

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## Pre - PA Allowance

*Prior authorization is not required if prescribed by an oncologist and/or the member has paid pharmacy claims for an oncology medication(s) in the past 6 months*

**Age**                    18 years of age or older

### Quantity

- **Maximum daily limit of methadone without a PA is 90 MME/day.**

### Tablets, Solutions, or Concentrates ≤ 90 MME/day

| Drug Strength                                                                         | Quantity                                                    | MME          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Dolophine 5mg                                                                         | 3 units per day<br>(Max: 270 tablets per 90 days) <b>OR</b> | 70.5 MME/day |
| Dolophine 10mg                                                                        | 1 unit per day<br>(Max: 90 tablets per 90 days) <b>OR</b>   | 47 MME/day   |
| Methadone 5mg/5mL (oral solution)                                                     | 15 units per day<br>(Max: 1350 mL per 90 days) <b>OR</b>    | 70.5 MME/day |
| Methadone 10mg/5mL (oral solution)                                                    | 7 units per day<br>(Max: 630 mL per 90 days) <b>OR</b>      | 65.8 MME/day |
| Methadone Intensol 10mg/mL (oral concentrate)<br>Methadose 10mg/mL (oral concentrate) | 1 unit per day<br>(Max: 90 mL per 90 days)                  | 47 MME/day   |

**Maximum daily limit of any combination: 90MME**

## Prior – Approval Limits

### Quantity

- The diagnoses pain associated with cancer, pain associated with sickle cell disease, or treatment associated with hospice, palliative, or end-of-life care **ONLY** are not subject to the maximum MME daily limit
- **Maximum daily limit of methadone with a PA is \*200 MME/day.**

### Pain

#### Tablets, Solutions, or Concentrates ≤ 200 MME/day

| Opioid    | Morphine Milligram Equivalent (MME)<br>Conversion Factor* |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Methadone | 4.7                                                       |

**Maximum daily limit of any combination: 200 MME**



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## **Addiction**

### **Tablets, Solutions, or Concentrates ≤ 200 MME/day**

| <b>Drug Strength</b>                                                                                                                     | <b>Morphine Milligram Equivalent (MME) Conversion Factor*</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Methadone                                                                                                                                | 4.7                                                           |
| Methadose 40mg (tablet for suspension, oral)<br>Methadone 40mg (tablet for suspension, oral)<br>Diskets 40mg (40mg rapid dissolve, oral) | **Should only be dispensed by a methadone clinic**            |

### **Maximum daily limit of any combination: 200 MME**

\*Multiply the dose for each opioid by the conversion factor to determine the dose in MMEs

\*\*MME limit does not apply to medication supplied by SAMHSA certified methadone clinics

**Duration** 6 months

12 months for pain associated with cancer, pain associated with sickle cell disease, or treatment associated with hospice, palliative, or end-of-life care

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## **Prior – Approval *Renewal* Limits**

Same as above

## **Rationale**

### **Summary**

Methadone hydrochloride is used in the treatment pain severe enough to require long-term, around-the-clock, daily opioid treatment for which alternative options are inadequate, detoxification treatment of opioid addiction, and maintenance treatment of opioid addiction in conjunction with appropriate social and medical services. Patients should be assessed for their risk of developing substance abuse prior to being prescribed methadone. When used for the detoxification and maintenance treatment of opioid addiction, methadone should only be prescribed by qualified physicians in conjunction with appropriate medical and social services and should only be dispensed by certified treatment programs in accordance with the treatment requirements stipulated in the Federal Opioid Treatment Standards (1-7). The MME limits in this policy do not apply to medication supplied by SAMHSA certified methadone clinics. The safety and effectiveness of methadone hydrochloride in pediatric patients below the age of 18 have not been established (1-5).

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Prior approval is required to ensure the safe, clinically appropriate, and cost-effective use of methadone while maintaining optimal therapeutic outcomes.

## References

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## Policy History

| Date     | Action         |
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| May 2015 | Addition to PA |

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| March 2016     | Annual editorial review and reference update<br>Policy number changed from 5.02.41 to 5.70.41                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| September 2016 | Annual review<br>Addition of prescriber agrees to assess the benefits of pain control (i.e. Care Plan signs of abuse, severity of pain) after 3 months of therapy; prescriber agrees to assess patient for serotonin syndrome; no dual therapy with opioid addiction treatment; no dual therapy with an anti-anxiety benzodiazepine(s): alprazolam (Xanax), clonazepam (Klonopin), diazepam (Valium), lorazepam (Ativan), oxazepam (Serax), chlordiazepoxide (Librium), clorazepate dipotassium (Tranxene) |
| March 2017     | Annual editorial review<br>Addition of age requirement to the renewal section                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| May 2017       | Addition of patient will NOT be receiving other opioids if patients currently on opioid therapy must be tapered off within 30 days and the confirmation on renewal of no opioid therapy. Also, the addition of 1 month taper for patients on opioid therapy<br>Addition of patient is not taking exclusively for pain control to opioid addiction section<br>Change in Standard Allowance                                                                                                                  |
| September 2017 | Annual review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| February 2018  | Addition of "prior authorization is not required if the member has paid pharmacy claims for an oncology medication(s) in the past 6 months"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| March 2018     | Annual editorial review and reference update                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| October 2018   | Addition of Opioid Analgesic REMS requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| November 2018  | Annual review and reference update. Addition of Opioid Analgesic REMS link per SME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| March 2019     | Annual review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| December 2019  | Annual review. Revised quantity limits for methadone to fall within the MME allowance. Added statement that methadone 40 mg should only be dispensed by a methadone clinic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| March 2020     | Annual editorial review and reference update. Updated Opioid Analgesic REMS link                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| March 2021     | Annual review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| December 2021  | Annual review. Per FEP, removed PA quantity limits and decreased PA limits to 200 MME per day. Added requirement "Prescriber agrees to evaluate patient's response to therapy before changing dose."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| February 2022  | Updated Pre-PA allowance with oncology step edit statement. Per FEP: added "Prescribers should counsel patients and caregivers about the use of naloxone for opioid overdose" under regulatory status, and added MME calculating links                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| March 2022     | Annual review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

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| March 2023     | Per SME, addition to regulatory status that prescriber should consider prescribing naloxone if clinically indicated. Added statement to quantity table that the 200 MME limit does not apply to medication provided through a SAMHSA certified methadone clinic. Changed policy number to 5.70.041 |
| May 2023       | Adjusted MME for methadone per CDC update                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| September 2023 | Annual review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| December 2023  | Annual review. Streamlined requirements. Added indications of cancer pain, sickle cell disease pain, and hospice/palliative/end-of-life care with an approval duration of 12 months. Removed SAMHSA requirement for opioid addiction treatment                                                     |
| March 2024     | Annual review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

## Keywords

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**This policy was approved by the FEP® Pharmacy and Medical Policy Committee on March 8, 2024 and is effective on April 1, 2024.**

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### Appendix 1 - List of Serotonergic Medications

#### Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)

|              |                                                   |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| paroxetine   | Paxil, Paxil CR, Pexeva, Brisdelle                |
| fluvoxamine  | Luvox, Luvox CR                                   |
| fluoxetine   | Prozac, Prozac Weekly, Sarafem, Selfemra, Symbyax |
| sertraline   | Zoloft                                            |
| citalopram   | Celexa                                            |
| escitalopram | Lexapro                                           |

#### Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs)

|                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| venlafaxine    | Effexor XR        |
| desvenlafaxine | Pristiq, Khedezla |
| duloxetine     | Cymbalta          |
| milnacipran    | Savella           |

#### Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs)

|               |                                  |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| amitriptyline | No brand name currently marketed |
| desipramine   | Norpramin                        |
| clomipramine  | Anafranil                        |
| imipramine    | Tofranil, Tofranil PM            |
| nortriptyline | Pamelor, Aventyl                 |
| protriptyline | Vivactil                         |
| doxepin       | Zonalon, Silenor                 |
| trimipramine  | Surmontil                        |

#### Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs)

|                 |                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| isocarboxazid   | Marplan                  |
| phenelzine      | Nardil                   |
| selegiline      | Emsam, Eldepryl, Zelapar |
| tranylcypromine | Parnate                  |

|                    |                            |                              |               |
|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Section:</b>    | Prescription Drugs         | <b>Effective Date:</b>       | April 1, 2024 |
| <b>Subsection:</b> | Analgesics and Anesthetics | <b>Original Policy Date:</b> | May 22, 2015  |
| <b>Subject:</b>    | Methadone                  | <b>Page:</b>                 | 14 of 14      |

**Other Psychiatric Medicines**

|             |                                  |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| amoxapine   | No brand name currently marketed |
| maprotiline | No brand name currently marketed |
| nefazodone  | No brand name currently marketed |
| trazodone   | Oleptro                          |
| buspirone   | No brand name currently marketed |
| vilazodone  | Viibryd                          |
| mirtazapine | Remeron, Remeron Soltab          |
| lithium     | Lithobid                         |

**Migraine Medicines**

|              |                                                                       |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| almotriptan  | Axert                                                                 |
| frovatriptan | Frova                                                                 |
| naratriptan  | Amerge                                                                |
| rizatriptan  | Maxalt, Maxalt-MLT                                                    |
| sumatriptan  | Imitrex, Imitrex Statdose, Alsuma, Sumavel Dosepro, Zecuity, Treximet |
| zolmitriptan | Zomig, Zomig-ZMT                                                      |

**Antiemetics**

|              |                             |
|--------------|-----------------------------|
| ondansetron  | Zofran, Zofran ODT, Zuplenz |
| granisetron  | Kytril, Sancuso             |
| dolasetron   | Anzemet                     |
| palonosetron | Aloxi                       |

**Other Serotonergic Medicines**

|                  |                                          |
|------------------|------------------------------------------|
| dextromethorphan | Bromfed-DM, Delsym, Mucinex DM, Nuedexta |
| linezolid        | Zyvox                                    |
| cyclobenzaprine  | Amrix                                    |
| methylene blue   |                                          |
| St. John's wort  |                                          |
| tryptophan       |                                          |