



SUSPECTED OPIOID WITHDRAWAL

Adult

Definitions

Opioid Withdrawal Disorder: A life-threatening condition resulting from opioid dependence and the cessation or reduction in opioid use that has been heavy and prolonged; or the administration of an opioid antagonist (e.g., Naloxone) after a period of opioid use. Signs and symptoms include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Tachycardia | Nausea |
| Diaphoresis | Stomach/Abdominal cramps |
| Restlessness and/or Agitation | Body aches |
| Dilated Pupils | Achy bones/joints |
| Rhinorrhea or Lacrimation | Restlessness |
| Vomiting, Diarrhea | Hot and Cold |
| Yawning | Nasal congestion |
| Piloerection | |



COWS Calculator

MAT: Medication-Assisted Treatment

COWS: Clinical Opioid Withdrawal Scale - [MDcalc COWS Calculator](#)

ALS

Suspected Opioid Withdrawal Disorder

- Provide supportive treatment and counseling
- Assess patient interest in Suboxone (Buprenorphine and Naloxone)
- Assess for COWS
- Verify patient contact information
- Inform the patient that the hospital's navigator may initiate contact within 72 hours to offer additional treatment

COWS ≥ 7 and Patient Agrees to Treatment

- Give water to moisten mucous membranes
- Administer **16 mg Suboxone SL**
- Reassess after 10 minutes

If symptoms worsen or persist

- Re-dose with **8 mg Suboxone SL**
- Total max dose 24 mg SL

COWS < 7 or Patient Denies Treatment or is Ineligible

- Recommend transport
- Provide MAT brochure
- Provide Naloxone



Yolo County Emergency Medical Services Agency

Protocols

Revised Date: October 22, 2024

Contraindications

- Under 16 years of age
- Asymptomatic; No evidence or reported opioid withdrawal signs or symptoms
- Any methadone use within the last 10 days
- Altered mental status and unable to give consent
- Severe medical illness (sepsis, respiratory distress, etc.)
- Current intoxication or recent use of benzodiazepine, alcohol, or other intoxicants suspected
- Unable to comprehend potential risks and benefits for any reason
- Not a candidate for Suboxone treatment for any reason

Direction

- Contact Base Hospital for any treatment or transport concerns



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COWS Criteria

Anxiety or Irritability

- 0 None
- 1 Reports increasing irritability or anxiousness
- 2 Obviously irritable or anxious
- 4 Too irritable to participate or affecting participation

Resting Heart Rate (Measured after sitting for 1 min)

- 0 ≤ 80 BPM
- 1 81 – 100 BPM
- 2 101 – 120 BPM
- 4 ≥ 120 BPM

Restlessness (Observed during assessment)

- 0 Able to sit still
- 1 Reports difficult sitting still, but able to do so
- 3 Frequent shifting or extraneous leg/arm movement
- 5 Unable to sit still for more than a few seconds

Tremor (Observation of outstretched hands)

- 0 No tremors
- 1 Tremor can be felt but not observed
- 2 Slight observable tremors
- 4 Gross tremors or muscle twitching

Bone or Joint Aches

(If patient was having pain previously, only additional pain attributed to withdrawal is scored)

- 0 Not present
- 1 Mild diffuse discomfort
- 2 Reports sever diffuse aching of joints/muscles
- 4 Rubbing joints or muscles and unable to be still

GI Upset (Over last half-hour)

- 0 No GI Symptoms
- 1 Stomach cramps
- 2 Nausea or loose stool
- 3 Vomiting or diarrhea
- 5 Multiple episodes of diarrhea or vomiting

Gooseflesh Skin

- 0 Skin is smooth
- 3 Piloerection can be felt or arm hair standing up
- 5 Prominent piloerection

Yawning (Observation during assessment)

- 0 No yawning
- 1 Yawns once or twice during assessment
- 2 Yawns three or more times during assessment
- 4 Yawning several times per minute

Pupil Size

- 0 Pupils pinned or normal sized for ambient light
- 1 Pupils possibly larger than normal for ambient light
- 2 Pupils moderately dilated
- 5 Pupils very dilated

Runny Nose or Tearing

(Not accounted for by cold symptoms nor allergies)

- 0 Not present
- 1 Nasal stuffiness or unusually moist eyes
- 2 Nose running or eyes tearing
- 4 Nose constantly running, tears stream down face

Sweating

(Over past half hour not accounted for by environment or activity)

- 0 No report of chills or flushing
- 1 Subjective report of chills or flushing
- 2 Flushed or observable moistness to face
- 3 Beads of sweat on brow or face
- 4 Sweat streaming off face

TOTAL COWS SCORE:

5 – 12	Mild
13 – 24	Moderate
25 – 36	Moderately Severe
> 36	Severe Withdrawal