



**Mobile Integrated Healthcare  
OPIOID WITHDRAWAL  
Practice Guideline**

**Patient Care Goals**

1. Identify patients for EMS buprenorphine treatment
2. Offer harm reduction kit, informational brochure, MIH referral for opioid withdrawal patients refusing transport

**Patient Presentation:**

Inclusion Criteria

Patient experiencing opioid withdrawal secondary to either:

- a) Naloxone administration following opioid overdose
- b) Period of abstinence from opioid use

Patient willing to share name AND date of birth

Adult age 18 or older

Exclusion criteria

Pregnant

Methadone use **within the past 24 hours**

Patient lacks decision-making capacity

**Patient Management:**

Supportive treatment, counseling, option for buprenorphine treatment.

*Do not delay* other appropriate emergency treatment for patients presenting with abnormal vital signs plus symptoms of distress

**Medications:**

Consider giving pt some water to moisten mucous membranes

Buprenorphine

Initial Dose: 16 mg SL

After 10 mins symptoms remain **with COWS>7:**

Second Dose: 8 mg SL

Max total 24 mg SL

**Note: If patient took home buprenorphine within last 24 hours, administer up to 2 doses of 8 mg buprenorphine Q10 mins if COWS>7 to max total 24 mg inclusive of home dose. Contact OLMC w/questions**

Ondansetron PRN nausea or vomiting

ODT: 15-30 kg: 4 mg

>30 kg: 8 mg

Acetaminophen PRN pain management

Single adult dose: 1g PO

Signs and Symptoms of withdrawal

Tachycardia, gastrointestinal distress, hot and cold flashes, poor concentration, diaphoresis, rhinorrhea, restlessness, piloerection

**\*\*\*While you can offer guidance and alternative options to transport, you CAN NOT refuse transport for any patient\*\*\***

**Decision-Making Capacity** indicates an individual who is alert and oriented, has the capacity to understand the circumstances surrounding his/her illness or impairment as well as the possible risks associated with refusing treatment and/or transport, and can communicate their decision.

**Opioid Alert:** During full report to EMSCOM, indicate 'Opioid Alert BUP+' if pt received buprenorphine or 'Opioid Alert BUP-' if pt did not receive buprenorphine

**Harm Reduction Kit** may include the following: naloxone, fentanyl test strips, opioid use disorder information and treatment resources

**Documentation:**

Medical decision-making

Details of overdose and/or withdrawal

COWS score

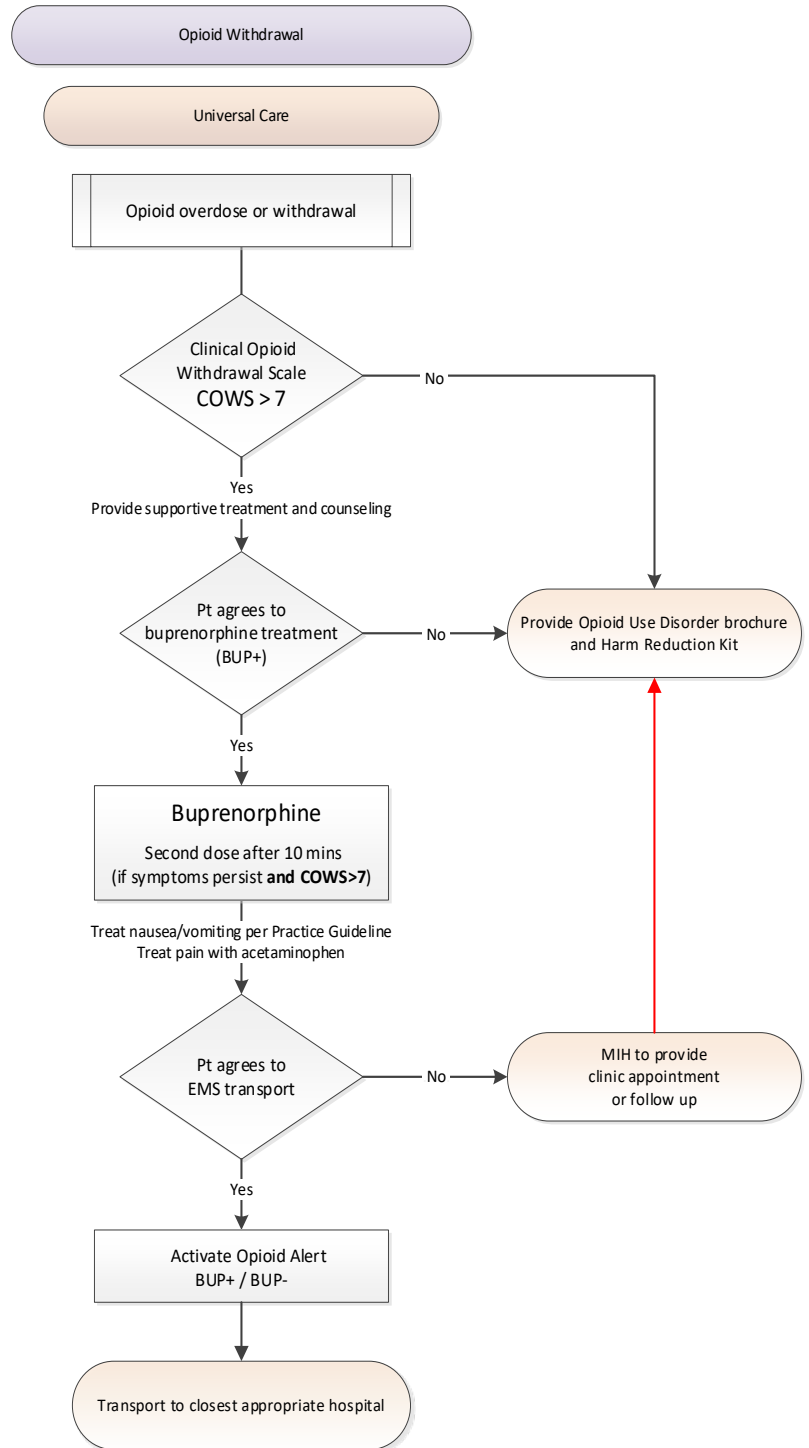
Acceptance or refusal of buprenorphine and transport

**Quality Assurance:**

Pt has decision-making capacity

Pt agrees to buprenorphine

treatment (BUP+)



Initiated: 04/15/2023

Reviewed/Revised: 01/01/2025

Revision: 1

Approved: Benjamin Weston, MD, MPH Medical Director

Approved: Dan Pojar, BSEMS, FP-C, NRP EMS Division Director

WI DHS EMS Approval: 03/31/2023



## Clinical Opioid Withdrawal Scale (COWS)

< 5 – No active withdrawal	13-24 – Moderate withdrawal	>36 – Severe withdrawal
5-12 – mild withdrawal	25-36 – Moderately severe withdrawal	
<p><b>Resting Pulse Rate:</b> _____ beats/minute  <i>Measured after patient is sitting or lying for one minute</i></p> <p>0 Pulse rate 80 or below                      1 Pulse rate 81-100                      2 Pulse rate 101-120                      4 Pulse rate greater than 120</p>	<p><b>GI Upset:</b> <i>Over last ½ hour</i></p> <p>0 No GI symptoms                      1 Stomach cramps                      2 Nausea or loose stool                      3 Vomiting or diarrhea                      5 Multiple episodes or diarrhea of vomiting</p>	
<p><b>Sweating:</b> <i>Over past ½ hour not accounted for by room temperature or patient activity</i></p> <p>0 No report of chills or flushing                      1 Subjective report of chills or flushing                      2 Flushed or observable moistness on face                      3 Beads of sweat on brow or face                      4 Sweat streaming off face</p>	<p><b>Bone or Joint Aches:</b> <i>IF patient was having pain previously, only the additional component attributed to opioid withdrawal is scored</i></p> <p>0 Not present                      1 Mild diffuse discomfort                      2 Patient reports severe diffuse aching of joints/muscles                      4 Patient is rubbing joints of muscles and is unable to sit still because of discomfort</p>	
<p><b>Restlessness:</b> <i>Observation during assessment</i></p> <p>0 Able to sit still                      1 Report difficulty sitting still, but is able to do so                      3 Frequent shifting or extraneous movements of legs/arms                      5 Unable to sit still for more than a few seconds</p>	<p><b>Yawning:</b> <i>Observation during assessment</i></p> <p>0 No yawning                      1 Yawning once or twice during assessment                      2 Yawning three or more times during assessment                      4 Yawning several times/minute</p>	
<p><b>Pupil Size</b></p> <p>0 Pupils pinned or normal size for room light                      1 Pupils possibly larger than normal for room light                      2 Pupils moderately dilated                      5 Pupils so dilated that only the rim of the iris is visible</p>	<p><b>Anxiety or Irritability</b></p> <p>0 None                      1 Patient reports increasing irritability or anxiousness                      2 Patient obviously irritable or anxious                      4 Patient is so irritable that participation in the assessment is difficult</p>	
<p><b>Tremor:</b> <i>Observation of outstretched hands</i></p> <p>0 No tremor                      1 Tremor can be felt, but no observed                      2 Slight tremor observable                      4 Gross tremor or muscle twitching</p>	<p><b>Gooseflesh skin</b></p> <p>0 Skin is smooth                      3 Piloerection of skin can be felt or hairs standing up on arms                      5 Prominent piloerection</p>	
<p><b>Runny Nose or tearing:</b> <i>Not accounted for by cold symptoms or allergies</i></p> <p>0 Not present                      1 Nasal stuffiness or unusually moist eyes                      2 Nose running or tearing                      4 Nose constantly running or tears streaming down</p>	<p><b>Total Score</b> _____                      The total score is the sum of all 11 items</p>	

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