



# Yolo County Emergency Medical Services Agency

## Protocols

Revised Date: October 22, 2024

### 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



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### 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:

<b>5 – 12</b>	<b>Mild</b>
<b>13 – 24</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>25 – 36</b>	<b>Moderately Severe</b>
<b>&gt; 36</b>	<b>Severe Withdrawal</b>