

Tips on Addressing COVID-19 at an Opioid Treatment Program

Planning Ahead

- Updating patients' contact and emergency contact information
- Gathering PPE
- Identifying patients at high risk for COVID-19
 - Including patients who are older or have a compromised immune system
- Reaching out to OTPs that have faced COVID-19
- Connecting with state opioid treatment authority about COVID-19 plans
- Looking into increased use of technology: email, video conferencing
- Planning for worst-case scenarios

Regulatory Changes

- Federal, state, and local guidance may come rapidly—throughout the course of a day—and in large quantities
- Studying guidance as it arrives; preparing to implement (e.g., waivers for take-home medication, telehealth)

Open, Honest Communication

- Being transparent with patients and with staff
- Explaining why changes are needed
- Empowering patients and staff to make suggestions

Preparing Staff

- Small, frequent huddles to share information and maximize opportunity for discussion
- Walk-throughs to prepare and discover issues to resolve
- Planning for possible illness
 - Staggered schedule with some staff working remotely, ready to fill in for others
 - Determining if other staff could be reassigned to OTP with training

Operational Changes

- Social distancing as everyday practice for staff and patients
- Limiting number of patients in clinic and expediting dispensing
 - Scheduled dosing/modifying clinic hours—with attention to public transportation schedules
 - Curbside medication dispensing
- Telehealth sessions (telephonic or video) and screening by phone
- Weighing group therapy in light of COVID-19 risk; looking at online options
- Expanding take-home medication
 - Reevaluating risks and benefits for who receives take-homes and number of doses
 - Educating patients: taking as prescribed, keeping medication safe
 - Considering naloxone distribution (e.g., kits, prescriptions) to address overdose risk
 - Staggering methadone distribution to avoid large quantities in a community
- Screening at entrance, with questions such as:
 1. Do you have body aches, cough, difficulty breathing, fever, muscle aches, or sore throat?
 2. Have you had contact with anyone with confirmed COVID-19 in the last 14 days? Have you cared for, lived with, or had known contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19?
 3. Have you been tested for COVID-19 in the past 14 days, and are you still waiting for the result or was the result positive?

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