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THE PRESCRIBER e-LETTER

MassHealth Pharmacy Program

Upcoming Changes to MassHealth Coverage of Long-acting Buprenorphine Products

Overview of the Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder with Buprenorphine

Buprenorphine is a partial agonist at the μ opioid receptor and antagonist at the κ opioid receptor. It is well established as a mainstay of treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD).[1] Sublocade® (buprenorphine extended-release injection) and Brixadi® (buprenorphine extended-release injection) are currently the only long-acting formulations of buprenorphine approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of OUD.[1-3]

Changes to the Product Labelling for Sublocade® (buprenorphine extended-release injection)

On February 24, 2025, Sublocade® received updated product labelling to reflect the following:

- **Rapid Initiation Protocol**: Previously, Sublocade® could only be initiated after a patient received at least seven days of therapy with transmucosal buprenorphine. Sublocade® can now be initiated after a single dose of transmucosal buprenorphine and a one-hour observation period to confirm tolerability.
- **Alternative Injection Sites**: Previously, Sublocade® was only to be administered in the abdomen. It can now be administered subcutaneously in the abdomen, thigh, buttock, or back of the upper arm.[2]

Changes in the Coverage of Long-acting Buprenorphine Products Effective July 1, 2025

The prior authorization (PA) criteria for Brixadi® will be updated to remove low belly fat and/or body fat as rationale to bypass Sublocade®, which is a preferred product on the MassHealth Drug List. These changes are due to the expanded injection sites now available for administration of Sublocade®.

MassHealth members with an active PA approval for Brixadi® will need to submit a new PA once their current approval expires. Documentation of clinical rationale why the member cannot use Sublocade® will be required prior to approval. Sublocade® is currently available without PA. Providers and members may elect to switch members to Sublocade® ahead of this transition if clinically appropriate.

Long-acting Buprenorphine Management Effective July 1, 2025

Available without PA:
Sublocade® (buprenorphine extended-release injection)
Require PA:
Brixadi® (buprenorphine extended-release injection) PA Criteria for Approval: 1. Diagnosis of opioid dependence 2. Member has been initiated on treatment with a single dose of a transmucosal buprenorphine product or is already being treated with buprenorphine 3. Clinical rationale for use of Brixadi® instead of Sublocade® documented as ONE of the following: a. Medical records documenting an inadequate response or adverse reaction to Sublocade® b. Medical necessity for weekly dosing

Additional information can be found on the MassHealth Drug List.

References

1. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. Clinical guidelines for medications for opioid use disorder: a treatment improvement protocol TIP 63. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); DHHS Publication No. PEP21-02-01-003. 2021.
2. Sublocade® (buprenorphine extended-release) injection, for subcutaneous use [package insert]. North Chesterfield, VA: Indivior PLC; 2025.
3. Brixadi® [package insert]. Plymouth Meeting (PA): Braeburn Pharmaceuticals; 2023 May.

The Prescriber e-Letter is an update designed to enhance the transparency and efficiency of the MassHealth drug prior-authorization (PA) process and the MassHealth Drug List. Each issue highlights key clinical information and updates to the MassHealth Drug List. The Prescriber E-Letter was prepared by the MassHealth Drug Utilization Review Program and the MassHealth Pharmacy Program.