

# FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

## How to Use Methadone Safely



### **Methadone Misuse: A Complex and Pressing National Concern**

Methadone is a commonly known drug used to assist addicts in their recovery of habit-forming drugs or prescription medications. Methadone is also prescribed to treat moderate-to-severe chronic pain patients. Whether used for addiction treatment or pain management, methadone is safe and effective when taken properly.

In an effort to inform healthcare professionals and consumers about safe methadone use, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), agencies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), are collaborating on a nationwide educational campaign.

*Follow Directions: How to Use Methadone Safely* – is designed to reach treatment programs and patients, and consumers to help educate them about the safe use of methadone

It is essential that prescribing clinicians and physicians are aware of a patient's overall health and other medications being taken. Patients need to be educated on the safe use of methadone and counseled on the possible adverse consequences of misuse, abuse or sharing of the medication. Due to its complex pharmacology, methadone can be lethal or life threatening if it is not used exactly as directed or is mixed with certain other medicines.

To further spread the message to consumers, educational information is being distributed through pharmacies to patients who have been prescribed methadone. SAMHSA and FDA will partner with federal agencies and healthcare organizations to distribute the message of safe use.

“The methadone safety campaign materials provide simple instructions for illicit and prescription drug addiction treatment and for pain management patients,” noted H. Westley Clark, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Director of SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. “Our goal is to ensure the understanding of methadone’s safe use by all patients and prescribing healthcare professionals.”

Methadone’s use as a pain reliever has dramatically increased over the last several years. According to a 2008 federal government report, methadone has been associated with an increase in deaths and emergency room visits.

People who take methadone normally feel relief within four to eight hours. However, a single dose of methadone can remain in the body anywhere from eight to 59 hours. As a result, methadone may build up to toxic levels if taken too often, in too high an amount or with other medications.

“Used as prescribed, methadone is a safe and effective drug,” said Douglas Throckmorton, M.D., Deputy Director of FDA’s Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. “Prescribing methadone is



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complex. However, with proper education to physicians and patients, the risk of misuse or abuse can be minimized.”

Programs and clinics dispensing methadone for addiction treatment must be certified by SAMHSA and registered with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). When used as an analgesic, methadone may be prescribed by any practitioner registered by the DEA to prescribe Schedule II controlled substances and dispensed by any licensed pharmacy. FDA updated the methadone product label for physicians prescribing methadone for pain management to update dosing information and to include the potential for serious and life-threatening side effects in 2006.

For more information on the campaign, or to download free copies of the educational materials, please visit [www.dpt.samhsa.gov/methadonesafety](http://www.dpt.samhsa.gov/methadonesafety) or call 1-800-662-HELP.

