BUPRENORPHINE AND NALOXONE (Suboxone)

EMSAC JUNE 2026

ACTION: Partial Opioid Agonist

- Buprenorphine: Binds opioid receptors with high affinity but moderate efficacy (partial agonist). This partial agonism makes buprenorphine suitable for treating withdrawal symptoms while improving its safety profile compared to other opioids.
- Naloxone: Antagonizes effects of opioids by competing at the receptor site, resulting in reversal of respiratory depression associated with opiate overdoses. When taken sublingually Naloxone is inert and has no effect on the patient.

INDICATIONS

- Opiate withdrawal with **COWS** score ≥8

~~INDICATION~~	~~ADULT~~	~~PEDIATRIC~~
~~Opiate withdrawal with COWS score ≥8~~	~~16 mg SL~~ ~~May repeat 8 mg x1 in 10 min.~~	~~Not applicable under age 16~~

CONTRAINDICATIONS

- No opioid withdrawal signs or symptoms
- < 16 years of age
- Any methadone use within the past 10 days
- Severe medical illness (sepsis, respiratory distress etc)
- Altered mental status and unable to give consent or comprehend potential risks and benefits for any reason
- Hypersensitivity or prior allergic reaction
- ~~Patient meets exclusion criteria described in protocol 2.18 Opiate Withdrawal Appendix B~~
- COWS score < 8

POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS:

- Precipitated opioid withdrawal (less likely to occur if patient is already withdrawing with a COWS score ≥ 8)
- Diaphoresis
- Headache
- Nausea
- Constipation
- ~~Tooth decay~~

ADULT DOSE/ROUTE (≥ 16 years old)**:**

- 16 mg SL, may repeat 8 mg x1 in 10 min

PEDIATRIC DOSE/ROUTE: N/A

NOTES:

- Naloxone is poorly absorbed through the GI tract. When formulated with buprenorphine, naloxone reduces the risk of overdose in those who misuse the combination medication by injection, while also reducing its abuse potential.
- When buprenorphine is formulated alone, common brand names include Belbuca, Buprenex, Butrans, Sublocade, and Subutex, whereas Suboxone is a brand name of a formulation containing buprenorphine and naloxone.