



State of Vermont
Department of Corrections
280 State Drive
Waterbury, VT 05671-1000

Agency of Human Services

TO: Correctional Facility Staff
FROM: Facilities and Health and Wellness Divisions
DATE: February 18, 2025
SUBJECT: Buprenorphine Medication Pass Changes

PRIORITY: High

The Vermont Department of Corrections led the country in the implementation of MAT distribution for incarcerated individuals. Yet, leadership and medical staff recognize growing burdens on staff with increasing numbers of individuals diagnosed with substance use disorder.

To both align MAT practices with community standards of care and maximize staff resources and time, the department will be making the following changes:

- Most MAT medication will now be administered in normal medication lines.
- The current MAT medication, which consists only of buprenorphine, will be replaced with a dual-product containing buprenorphine and naloxone. This is sometimes known as the brand name Suboxone.
- Individuals discovered diverting MAT medication (other than methadone) during medication pass, or otherwise in possession of more than or otherwise in possession of less than 2-doses of buprenorphine-based medication, will now be will now be subject to disciplinary action in the form of a Minor 1: passing or possession of contraband items instead of Major B20-B30.

This new process will begin effective **tomorrow**. Facility management teams and medical staff have prepared plans to implement this and selected notifying you today to minimize security risks, diversion of MAT medications, and grievances from incarcerated individuals.

Included with this document is an FAQ addressing why this change is occurring, safety and operational impacts, and other possible questions or concerns you may have.

The process for distribution will be as follows:

1. Distribution of MAT medications (other than methadone) will be completed in regular medication lines.
2. Individuals will receive all prescribed medications other than MAT first and complete a standard mouth check.
3. Individuals prescribed MAT will then receive their MAT medication. This medication must be deposited under the tongue.
4. The individual will then perform a mouth check ensuring the medication has been placed under the tongue.
5. The individual may then depart medication line.

6. Incarcerated individuals will be responsible to maintain the medication under their tongue until dissolved.
7. No disciplinary action will be initiated as long as the medication is not removed from the mouth.
8. Any individual who is found to be diverting buprenorphine-based medication during med-line, or otherwise in possession of less than 2-doses of buprenorphine-based medication will now be subject to a Minor DR #1. This updated facility rule does not apply to the diversion or unauthorized possession of amounts of buprenorphine-based medication in excess of 2 doses.
9. The Major DRs rules and process (B20 and A09) will still apply to diversion and unauthorized possession of buprenorphine-based medication in excess of two-doses.
10. Methadone is NOT a buprenorphine-based medication and the response to any unauthorized possession or diversion of this substance remains unchanged.

The Major B20 - B30 will still be used for diversion or attempted diversion of other medications, for unauthorized possession of medications in an individual cell or other location, or for any attempt to transfer or sell medication.

Methadone

1. While methadone is an important part of our MAT program, it does pose more significant safety risks if diverted or misused.
2. Each facility will operate a separate medication line for medications which due to safety concerns require a greater degree of observation and control in distribution.
3. Distribution of methadone shall be conducted at this higher observation medication pass consistent with current methadone distribution processes.

These changes align with all four initiatives of the Department's Strategic Plan by:

1. Streamlining processes and minimizing burden on Staff & Staffing
2. Redesigning Health & Wellness to improve outcomes for those we serve
3. Reducing stigma and creating more privacy for a more Equitable and Inclusion System
4. Evolve with best practices and Modernize Vermont's corrections system