



General

Guideline Title

CDC guideline for prescribing opioids for chronic pain — United States, 2016.

Bibliographic Source(s)

Dowell D, Haegerich TM, Chou R. CDC guideline for prescribing opioids for chronic pain - United States, 2016. MMWR Recomm Rep. 2016 Mar 18;65(1):1-49. [223 references] [PubMed](#)

Guideline Status

This is the current release of the guideline.

This guideline meets NGC's 2013 (revised) inclusion criteria.

Regulatory Alert

FDA Warning/Regulatory Alert

Note from the National Guideline Clearinghouse: This guideline references a drug(s) for which important revised regulatory and/or warning information has been released.

- [April 20, 2017 – Codeine and Tramadol Medicines](#) : The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is restricting the use of codeine and tramadol medicines in children. These medicines carry serious risks, including slowed or difficult breathing and death, which appear to be a greater risk in children younger than 12 years, and should not be used in these children. These medicines should also be limited in some older children. Single-ingredient codeine and all tramadol-containing products are FDA-approved only for use in adults. FDA is also recommending against the use of codeine and tramadol medicines in breastfeeding mothers due to possible harm to their infants.
- [August 31, 2016 – Opioid pain and cough medicines combined with benzodiazepines](#) : A U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) review has found that the growing combined use of opioid medicines with benzodiazepines or other drugs that depress the central nervous system (CNS) has resulted in serious side effects, including slowed or difficult breathing and deaths. FDA is adding Boxed Warnings to the drug labeling of prescription opioid pain and prescription opioid cough medicines and benzodiazepines.

Recommendations

Major Recommendations

Definitions for the recommendation category (A or B) and type of evidence (1, 2, 3, or 4) can be found at the end of the "Major

Recommendations" field.

Determining When to Initiate or Continue Opioids for Chronic Pain

1. Nonpharmacologic therapy and nonopioid pharmacologic therapy are preferred for chronic pain. Clinicians should consider opioid therapy only if expected benefits for both pain and function are anticipated to outweigh risks to the patient. If opioids are used, they should be combined with nonpharmacologic therapy and nonopioid pharmacologic therapy, as appropriate (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 3).
2. Before starting opioid therapy for chronic pain, clinicians should establish treatment goals with all patients, including realistic goals for pain and function, and should consider how opioid therapy will be discontinued if benefits do not outweigh risks. Clinicians should continue opioid therapy only if there is clinically meaningful improvement in pain and function that outweighs risks to patient safety (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 4).
3. Before starting and periodically during opioid therapy, clinicians should discuss with patients known risks and realistic benefits of opioid therapy and patient and clinician responsibilities for managing therapy (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 3).

Opioid Selection, Dosage, Duration, Follow-up, and Discontinuation

4. When starting opioid therapy for chronic pain, clinicians should prescribe immediate-release opioids instead of extended-release/long-acting (ER/LA) opioids (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 4).
5. When opioids are started, clinicians should prescribe the lowest effective dosage. Clinicians should use caution when prescribing opioids at any dosage, should carefully reassess evidence of individual benefits and risks when considering increasing dosage to ≥ 50 morphine milligram equivalents (MME)/day, and should avoid increasing dosage to ≥ 90 MME/day or carefully justify a decision to titrate dosage to ≥ 90 MME/day (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 3).
6. Long-term opioid use often begins with treatment of acute pain. When opioids are used for acute pain, clinicians should prescribe the lowest effective dose of immediate-release opioids and should prescribe no greater quantity than needed for the expected duration of pain severe enough to require opioids. Three days or less will often be sufficient; more than seven days will rarely be needed (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 4).
7. Clinicians should evaluate benefits and harms with patients within 1 to 4 weeks of starting opioid therapy for chronic pain or of dose escalation. Clinicians should evaluate benefits and harms of continued therapy with patients every 3 months or more frequently. If benefits do not outweigh harms of continued opioid therapy, clinicians should optimize other therapies and work with patients to taper opioids to lower dosages or to taper and discontinue opioids (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 4).

Assessing Risk and Addressing Harms of Opioid Use

8. Before starting and periodically during continuation of opioid therapy, clinicians should evaluate risk factors for opioid-related harms. Clinicians should incorporate into the management plan strategies to mitigate risk, including considering offering naloxone when factors that increase risk for opioid overdose, such as history of overdose, history of substance use disorder, higher opioid dosages (≥ 50 MME/day), or concurrent benzodiazepine use, are present (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 4).
9. Clinicians should review the patient's history of controlled substance prescriptions using state prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) data to determine whether the patient is receiving opioid dosages or dangerous combinations that put him or her at high risk for overdose. Clinicians should review PDMP data when starting opioid therapy for chronic pain and periodically during opioid therapy for chronic pain, ranging from every prescription to every 3 months (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 4).
10. When prescribing opioids for chronic pain, clinicians should use urine drug testing before starting opioid therapy and consider urine drug testing at least annually to assess for prescribed medications as well as other controlled prescription drugs and illicit drugs (recommendation category: B, evidence type: 4).
11. Clinicians should avoid prescribing opioid pain medication and benzodiazepines concurrently whenever possible (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 3).
12. Clinicians should offer or arrange evidence-based treatment (usually medication-assisted treatment with buprenorphine or methadone in combination with behavioral therapies) for patients with opioid use disorder (recommendation category: A, evidence type: 2).

Definitions

Recommendation Category

Based on evidence type, balance between desirable and undesirable effects, values and preferences, and resource allocation (cost).

Category A recommendation: Applies to all persons; most patients should receive the recommended course of action.

Category B recommendation: Individual decision making needed; different choices will be appropriate for different patients. Clinicians help patients arrive at a decision consistent with patient values and preferences and specific clinical situations.

Evidence Type

Based on study design as well as a function of limitations in study design or implementation, imprecision of estimates, variability in findings, indirectness of evidence, publication bias, magnitude of treatment effects, dose-response gradient, and constellation of plausible biases that could change effects.

Type 1 evidence: Randomized clinical trials or overwhelming evidence from observational studies.

Type 2 evidence: Randomized clinical trials with important limitations, or exceptionally strong evidence from observational studies.

Type 3 evidence: Observational studies or randomized clinical trials with notable limitations.

Type 4 evidence: Clinical experience and observations, observational studies with important limitations, or randomized clinical trials with several major limitations.

Clinical Algorithm(s)

None provided

Scope

Disease/Condition(s)

Chronic pain (i.e., pain conditions that typically last >3 months or past the time of normal tissue healing)

Guideline Category

Prevention

Risk Assessment

Treatment

Clinical Specialty

Family Practice

Geriatrics

Internal Medicine

Nursing

Obstetrics and Gynecology

Preventive Medicine

Psychiatry

Psychology

Intended Users

Advanced Practice Nurses

Nurses

Pharmacists

Physician Assistants

Physicians

Psychologists/Non-physician Behavioral Health Clinicians

Social Workers

Substance Use Disorders Treatment Providers

Guideline Objective(s)

- To provide recommendations for the prescribing of opioid pain medication by primary care clinicians for chronic pain (i.e., pain conditions that typically last >3 months or past the time of normal tissue healing) in outpatient settings outside of active cancer treatment, palliative care, and end-of-life care
- To ensure that clinicians and patients consider safer and more effective treatment, improve patient outcomes such as reduced pain and improved function, and reduce the number of persons who develop opioid use disorder, overdose, or experience other adverse events related to these drugs

Target Population

Patients aged ≥ 18 years with chronic pain outside of palliative and end-of-life care

Note: Patients within the scope of this guideline include cancer survivors with chronic pain who have completed cancer treatment, are in clinical remission, and are under cancer surveillance only. The guideline is not intended for patients undergoing active cancer treatment, palliative care, or end-of-life care because of the unique therapeutic goals, ethical considerations, opportunities for medical supervision, and balance of risks and benefits with opioid therapy in such care.

The recommendations address the use of opioid pain medication in certain special populations (e.g., older adults and pregnant women) and in populations with conditions posing special risks (e.g., a history of substance use disorder). The recommendations do not address the use of opioid pain medication in children or adolescents aged <18 years.

The recommendations are not intended to provide guidance on use of opioids as part of medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder.

Interventions and Practices Considered

1. Determining when to initiate or continue opioids for chronic pain
 - Nonpharmacologic therapy
 - Nonopioid pharmacologic therapy
 - Setting realistic treatment goals
 - Discussing risks and benefits of opioid therapy with patients
2. Opioid selection, dosage, duration, follow-up, and discontinuation
 - Immediate-release opioids versus extended-release/long-acting (ER/LA) opioids
 - Avoiding dosages ≥ 90 morphine milligram equivalents (MME)/day
 - Prescribing lowest possible opioid dosage for shortest period of time for acute pain
 - Evaluating benefits and harms of continued therapy with patients every 3 months or more frequently
3. Assessing risk and addressing harms of opioid use
 - Evaluating risk factors for opioid-related harms during continuation of therapy
 - Reviewing the patient's history of controlled substance prescriptions using state prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) data
 - Urine drug testing before starting and during opioid therapy
 - Avoiding prescribing opioid pain medication and benzodiazepines concurrently
 - Treatment of opioid use disorder with buprenorphine or methadone in combination with behavioral therapies

Major Outcomes Considered

- Effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy versus placebo, no opioid therapy, or nonopioid therapy for long-term (≥ 1 year) outcomes related to pain, function, and quality of life
- Variability of therapy effectiveness according to the type/cause of pain, patient demographics, and patient comorbidities
- Risks of opioids versus placebo or no opioids on abuse, addiction, overdose, and other harms, and how harms vary according to the type/cause of pain, patient demographics, patient comorbidities, and dose
- Comparative effectiveness of opioid dosing strategies
- Accuracy of instruments for predicting risk for opioid overdose, addiction, abuse, or misuse
- Effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies
- Comparative effectiveness of treatment strategies for managing patients with addiction
- Effects of prescribing opioid therapy versus not prescribing opioid therapy for acute pain on long-term use
- Effectiveness of nonpharmacologic (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy [CBT], exercise therapy, interventional treatments, and multimodal pain treatment) and nonopioid pharmacologic treatments (e.g., acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [NSAIDs], antidepressants, and anticonvulsants)
- Benefits and harms of opioid therapy

Methodology

Methods Used to Collect/Select the Evidence

Hand-searches of Published Literature (Primary Sources)

Hand-searches of Published Literature (Secondary Sources)

Searches of Electronic Databases

Description of Methods Used to Collect/Select the Evidence

Guideline Development Methods

A previously published systematic review sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field) on the effectiveness and risks of long-term opioid treatment of chronic pain initially served to directly inform the recommendation statements. This systematic clinical evidence review addressed the effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy for outcomes related to pain, function, and quality of life; the comparative effectiveness of different methods for initiating and titrating opioids; the harms and adverse events associated with opioids; and the accuracy of risk-prediction instruments and effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies on outcomes related to overdose, addiction, abuse, or misuse. For the current guideline development, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted additional literature searches to update the evidence review to include more recently available publications and to answer an additional clinical question about the effect of opioid therapy for acute pain on long-term use. CDC also conducted a contextual evidence review to supplement the clinical evidence review based on systematic searches of the literature. See the "Availability of Companion Documents" field for the clinical and contextual evidence reviews.

Summary of the Clinical Evidence Review

Primary Clinical Questions

CDC conducted a clinical systematic review of the scientific evidence to identify the effectiveness, benefits, and harms of long-term opioid therapy for chronic pain, consistent with the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) approach. Long-term opioid therapy is defined as use of opioids on most days for >3 months. A previously published AHRQ-funded systematic review on the effectiveness and risks of long-term opioid therapy for chronic pain comprehensively addressed four clinical questions. CDC, with the assistance of a methodology expert, searched the literature to identify newly published studies on these four original questions. Because long-term opioid use might be affected by use of opioids for acute pain, CDC subsequently developed a fifth clinical question (last in the series below), and in collaboration with a methodologist conducted a systematic review of the scientific evidence to address it. In brief, five clinical questions were addressed:

- The effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy versus placebo, no opioid therapy, or nonopioid therapy for long term (≥ 1 year) outcomes related to pain, function, and quality of life, and how effectiveness varies according to the type/cause of pain, patient demographics, and patient comorbidities (Key Question 1).
- The risks of opioids versus placebo or no opioids on abuse, addiction, overdose, and other harms, and how harms vary according to the type/cause of pain, patient demographics, patient comorbidities, and dose (Key Question 2).
- The comparative effectiveness of opioid dosing strategies (different methods for initiating and titrating opioids; immediate-release versus extended-release (ER)/long-acting (LA) opioids; different ER/LA opioids; immediate-release plus ER/LA opioids versus ER/LA opioids alone; scheduled, continuous versus as-needed dosing; dose escalation versus dose maintenance; opioid rotation versus maintenance; different strategies for treating acute exacerbations of chronic pain; decreasing opioid doses or tapering off versus continuation; and different tapering protocols and strategies) (Key Question 3).
- The accuracy of instruments for predicting risk for opioid overdose, addiction, abuse, or misuse; the effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies (use of risk prediction instruments); effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies including opioid management plans, patient education, urine drug testing, prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) data, monitoring instruments, monitoring intervals, pill counts, and abuse-deterrent formulations for reducing risk for opioid overdose, addiction, abuse, or misuse; and the comparative effectiveness of treatment strategies for managing patients with addiction (Key Question 4).
- The effects of prescribing opioid therapy versus not prescribing opioid therapy for acute pain on long-term use (Key Question 5).

The review was focused on the effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy on long-term (>1 year) outcomes related to pain, function, and quality of life to ensure that findings are relevant to patients with chronic pain and long-term opioid prescribing. The effectiveness of short-term opioid therapy has already been established. However, opioids have unique effects such as tolerance and physical dependence that might influence assessments of benefit over time. These effects raise questions about whether findings on short-term effectiveness of opioid therapy can be extrapolated to estimate benefits of long-term therapy for chronic pain. Thus, it is important to consider studies that provide data on long-term benefit. For certain opioid-related harms (overdose, fractures, falls, motor vehicle crashes), observational studies were included with outcomes measured at shorter intervals because such outcomes can occur early during opioid therapy, and such harms are not captured well in short-term clinical trials. A detailed listing of the key questions is provided in the clinical evidence review (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field).

Clinical Evidence Systematic Review Methods

Complete methods and data for the 2014 AHRQ report, upon which this updated systematic review is based, have been published previously. Study authors developed the protocol using a standardized process with input from experts and the public and registered the protocol in the PROSPERO database. For the 2014 AHRQ report, a research librarian searched MEDLINE, the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, PsycINFO, and CINAHL for English language articles published January 2008 through August 2014, using search terms for opioid therapy, specific opioids, chronic pain, and comparative study designs. Also included were relevant studies from an earlier review in which searches were conducted without a date restriction, reference lists were reviewed, and ClinicalTrials.gov was searched. CDC updated the AHRQ literature search using the same search strategies as in the original review including studies published before April 2015. Seven additional studies met inclusion criteria and were added to the review.

More detailed information about data sources and searches, study selection, data extraction and quality assessment, data synthesis, and update search yield and new evidence for the current review is provided in the clinical evidence review.

Summary of the Contextual Evidence Review

Primary Areas of Focus

Contextual evidence is complementary information that assists in translating the clinical research findings into recommendations. CDC conducted contextual evidence reviews on four topics to supplement the clinical evidence review findings:

- Effectiveness of nonpharmacologic (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy [CBT], exercise therapy, interventional treatments, and multimodal pain treatment) and nonopioid pharmacologic treatments (e.g., acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [NSAIDs], antidepressants, and anticonvulsants), including studies of any duration
- Benefits and harms of opioid therapy (including additional studies not included in the clinical evidence review, such as studies that were not restricted to patients with chronic pain, evaluated outcomes at any duration, performed ecological analyses, or used observational study designs other than cohort and case-cohort control studies) related to specific opioids, high-dose therapy, co-prescription with other controlled substances, duration of use, special populations, and potential usefulness of risk stratification/mitigation approaches, in addition to effectiveness of treatments associated with addressing potential harms of opioid therapy (opioid use disorder)
- Clinician and patient values and preferences related to opioids and medication risks, benefits, and use

- Resource allocation including costs and economic efficiency of opioid therapy and risk mitigation strategies

CDC also reviewed clinical guidelines that were relevant to opioid prescribing and could inform or complement the CDC recommendations under development (e.g., guidelines on nonpharmacologic and nonopioid pharmacologic treatments and guidelines with recommendations related to specific clinician actions such as urine drug testing or opioid tapering protocols).

Contextual Evidence Review Methods

CDC conducted a contextual evidence review to assist in developing the recommendations by providing an assessment of the balance of benefits and harms, values and preferences, and cost, consistent with the GRADE approach. Given the public health urgency for developing opioid prescribing recommendations, a rapid review was required for the contextual evidence review for the current guideline. Rapid reviews are used when there is a need to streamline the systematic review process to obtain evidence quickly. Methods used to streamline the process include limiting searches by databases, years, and languages considered, and truncating quality assessment and data abstraction protocols. CDC conducted "rapid reviews" of the contextual evidence on nonpharmacologic and nonopioid pharmacologic treatments, benefits and harms, values and preferences, and resource allocation.

In brief, CDC conducted systematic literature searches to identify original studies, systematic reviews, and clinical guidelines, depending on the topic being searched. CDC also solicited publication referrals from subject matter experts. Given the need for a rapid review process, grey literature (e.g., literature by academia, organizations, or government in the forms of reports, documents, or proceedings not published by commercial publishers) was not systematically searched. Database sources, including MEDLINE, PsycINFO, the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, and the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, varied by topic.

Number of Source Documents

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Systematic Review

Of the 4,209 citations identified at the title and abstract level, a total of 39 studies were included.

Clinical Evidence Review

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated the AHRQ literature search using the same search strategies as in the original review including studies published before April, 2015. Seven additional studies met inclusion criteria and were added to the review.

Contextual Review

See Tables 1-6 in the contextual evidence review for a complete listing of all studies included in the review (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field).

Methods Used to Assess the Quality and Strength of the Evidence

Weighting According to a Rating Scheme (Scheme Given)

Rating Scheme for the Strength of the Evidence

Evidence Type

Based on study design as well as a function of limitations in study design or implementation, imprecision of estimates, variability in findings, indirectness of evidence, publication bias, magnitude of treatment effects, dose-response gradient, and constellation of plausible biases that could change effects.

Type 1 evidence: Randomized clinical trials or overwhelming evidence from observational studies.

Type 2 evidence: Randomized clinical trials with important limitations, or exceptionally strong evidence from observational studies.

Type 3 evidence: Observational studies or randomized clinical trials with notable limitations.

Type 4 evidence: Clinical experience and observations, observational studies with important limitations, or randomized clinical trials with several major limitations.

Methods Used to Analyze the Evidence

Review of Published Meta-Analyses

Systematic Review with Evidence Tables

Description of the Methods Used to Analyze the Evidence

Guideline Development Using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation Method

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed this guideline using the [Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation \(GRADE\) method](#) . This method specifies the systematic review of scientific evidence and offers a transparent approach to grading quality of evidence and strength of recommendations. The method has been adapted by the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). CDC has applied the ACIP translation of the GRADE framework in this guideline. Within the ACIP GRADE framework, the body of evidence is categorized in a hierarchy. This hierarchy reflects degree of confidence in the effect of a clinical action on health outcomes. Refer to the "Rating Scheme for the Strength of the Evidence" field for category definitions. Type 1 evidence indicates that one can be very confident that the true effect lies close to that of the estimate of the effect; type 2 evidence means that the true effect is likely to be close to the estimate of the effect, but there is a possibility that it is substantially different; type 3 evidence means that confidence in the effect estimate is limited and the true effect might be substantially different from the estimate of the effect; and type 4 evidence indicates that one has very little confidence in the effect estimate, and the true effect is likely to be substantially different from the estimate of the effect. When no studies are present, evidence is considered to be insufficient.

Clinical Evidence Systematic Review Methods

Results were synthesized qualitatively, highlighting new evidence identified during the update process. Meta-analysis was not attempted due to the small numbers of studies, variability in study designs and clinical heterogeneity, and methodological shortcomings of the studies. More detailed information about data sources and searches, study selection, data extraction and quality assessment, data synthesis, and update search yield and new evidence for the current review is provided in the clinical evidence review (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field).

Contextual Evidence Review Methods

Multiple reviewers scanned study abstracts identified through the database searches and extracted relevant studies for review. CDC constructed narrative summaries and tables based on relevant articles that met inclusion criteria, which are provided in the contextual evidence review (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field).

Findings from the contextual reviews provide indirect evidence and should be interpreted accordingly. CDC did not formally rate the quality of evidence for the studies included in the contextual evidence review using the GRADE method. The studies that addressed benefits and harms, values and preferences, and resource allocation most often employed observational methods, used short follow-up periods, and evaluated selected samples. Therefore the strength of the evidence from these contextual review areas was considered to be low, comparable to type 3 or type 4 evidence. The quality of evidence for nonopioid pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic pain treatments was generally rated as moderate, comparable to type 2 evidence, in systematic reviews and clinical guidelines (e.g., for treatment of chronic neuropathic pain, low back pain, osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia). Similarly, the quality of evidence on pharmacologic and psychosocial opioid use disorder treatment was generally rated as moderate, comparable to type 2 evidence, in systematic reviews and clinical guidelines.

Methods Used to Formulate the Recommendations

Expert Consensus

Description of Methods Used to Formulate the Recommendations

Guideline Development Methods

Guideline Development Using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation (GRADE) Method

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed this guideline using the [GRADE method](#). This method specifies the systematic review of scientific evidence and offers a transparent approach to grading quality of evidence and strength of recommendations. The method has been adapted by the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). CDC has applied the ACIP translation of the GRADE framework in this guideline.

The ACIP GRADE framework places recommendations in two categories, Category A and Category B. Four major factors determine the category of the recommendation: the quality of evidence, the balance between desirable and undesirable effects, values and preferences, and resource allocation (cost). Refer to the "Rating Scheme for the Strength of the Recommendations" field for definitions of recommendation categories. According to the GRADE methodology, a particular quality of evidence does not necessarily imply a particular strength of recommendation. Category A recommendations can be made based on type 3 or type 4 evidence when the advantages of a clinical action greatly outweigh the disadvantages based on a consideration of benefits and harms, values and preferences, and costs. Category B recommendations are made when the advantages and disadvantages of a clinical action are more balanced. GRADE methodology is discussed extensively elsewhere. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) follows different methods for developing and categorizing recommendation (www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org). USPSTF recommendations focus on preventive services and are categorized as A, B, C, D, and I. Under the Affordable Care Act, all "nongrandfathered" health plans (that is, those health plans not in existence prior to March 23, 2010 or those with significant changes to their coverage) and expanded Medicaid plans are required to cover preventive services recommended by USPSTF with a category A or B rating with no cost sharing. The coverage requirements went into effect September 23, 2010. Similar requirements are in place for vaccinations recommended by ACIP, but do not exist for other recommendations made by CDC, including recommendations within this guideline.

A previously published systematic review sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) on the effectiveness and risks of long-term opioid treatment of chronic pain (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field) initially served to directly inform the recommendation statements. This systematic clinical evidence review addressed the effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy for outcomes related to pain, function, and quality of life; the comparative effectiveness of different methods for initiating and titrating opioids; the harms and adverse events associated with opioids; and the accuracy of risk-prediction instruments and effectiveness of risk mitigation strategies on outcomes related to overdose, addiction, abuse, or misuse. For the current guideline development, CDC conducted additional literature searches to update the evidence review to include more recently available publications and to answer an additional clinical question about the effect of opioid therapy for acute pain on long-term use.

As identified in the AHRQ-sponsored clinical evidence review, the overall evidence base for the effectiveness and risks of long-term opioid therapy is low in quality per the GRADE criteria. Thus, contextual evidence is needed to provide information about the benefits and harms of nonpharmacologic and nonopioid pharmacologic therapy and the epidemiology of opioid pain medication overdose and inform the recommendations. Further, as elucidated by the GRADE Working Group, supplemental information on clinician and patient values and preferences and resource allocation can inform judgments of benefits and harms and be helpful for translating the evidence into recommendations. CDC conducted a contextual evidence review to supplement the clinical evidence review based on systematic searches of the literature.

On the basis of a review of the clinical and contextual evidence, CDC drafted recommendation statements focused on determining when to initiate or continue opioids for chronic pain; opioid selection, dosage, duration, follow-up, and discontinuation; and assessing risk and addressing harms of opioid use. To help assure the draft guideline's integrity and credibility, CDC then began a multistep review process to obtain input from experts, stakeholders, and the public to help refine the recommendations.

More details on the methods used for the clinical and contextual reviews are available in the reviews (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field).

Recommendations

The recommendations are grouped into three areas for consideration:

- Determining when to initiate or continue opioids for chronic pain
- Opioid selection, dosage, duration, follow-up, and discontinuation
- Assessing risk and addressing harms of opioid use

There are 12 recommendations. Each recommendation is followed by a rationale for the recommendation, with considerations for implementation noted. In accordance with the ACIP GRADE process, CDC based the recommendations on consideration of the clinical evidence, contextual evidence (including benefits and harms, values and preferences, resource allocation), and expert opinion. For each recommendation statement, CDC notes the recommendation category (A or B) and the type of the evidence (1, 2, 3, or 4) supporting the statement. Expert opinion is reflected within each of the recommendation rationales. While there was not an attempt to reach consensus among experts, experts from the Core

Expert Group and from the Opioid Guideline Workgroup ("experts") expressed overall, general support for all recommendations. Where differences in expert opinion emerged for detailed actions within the clinical recommendations or for implementation considerations, CDC notes the differences of opinion in the supporting rationale statements.

Category A recommendations indicate that most patients should receive the recommended course of action; category B recommendations indicate that different choices will be appropriate for different patients, requiring clinicians to help patients arrive at a decision consistent with patient values and preferences and specific clinical situations. Consistent with the ACIP and GRADE process, category A recommendations were made, even with type 3 and 4 evidence, when there was broad agreement that the advantages of a clinical action greatly outweighed the disadvantages based on a consideration of benefits and harms, values and preferences, and resource allocation. Category B recommendations were made when there was broad agreement that the advantages and disadvantages of a clinical action were more balanced, but advantages were significant enough to warrant a recommendation. All recommendations are category A recommendations, with the exception of recommendation 10, which is rated as category B. Recommendations were associated with a range of evidence types, from type 2 to type 4.

In summary, the categorization of recommendations was based on the following assessment:

- No evidence shows a long-term benefit of opioids in pain and function versus no opioids for chronic pain with outcomes examined at least 1 year later (with most placebo-controlled randomized trials ≤ 6 weeks in duration).
- Extensive evidence shows the possible harms of opioids (including opioid use disorder, overdose, and motor vehicle injury).
- Extensive evidence suggests some benefits of nonpharmacologic and nonopioid pharmacologic treatments compared with long-term opioid therapy, with less harm.

Rating Scheme for the Strength of the Recommendations

Recommendation Categories

Based on evidence type, balance between desirable and undesirable effects, values and preferences, and resource allocation (cost).

Category A recommendation: Applies to all persons; most patients should receive the recommended course of action.

Category B recommendation: Individual decision making needed; different choices will be appropriate for different patients. Clinicians help patients arrive at a decision consistent with patient values and preferences and specific clinical situations.

Cost Analysis

Published cost analyses were reviewed.

Method of Guideline Validation

External Peer Review

Description of Method of Guideline Validation

Solicitation of Expert Opinion

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sought the input of experts to assist in reviewing the evidence and providing perspective on how CDC used the evidence to develop the draft recommendations. These experts, referred to as the "Core Expert Group" (CEG) included subject matter experts, representatives of primary care professional societies and state agencies, and an expert in guideline development methodology. CDC identified subject matter experts with high scientific standing; appropriate academic and clinical training and relevant clinical experience; and proven scientific excellence in opioid prescribing, substance use disorder treatment, and pain management. CDC identified representatives from leading primary care professional organizations to represent the audience for this guideline. Finally, CDC identified state agency officials and representatives based on their experience with state guidelines for opioid prescribing that were developed with multiple agency stakeholders and informed by scientific literature and existing evidence-based guidelines.

CDC provided to each expert written summaries of the scientific evidence (both the clinical and contextual evidence reviews conducted for this guideline) and CDC's draft recommendation statements. Experts provided individual ratings for each draft recommendation statement based on the

balance of benefits and harms, evidence strength, certainty of values and preferences, cost, recommendation strength, rationale, importance, clarity, and ease of implementation. CDC hosted an in-person meeting of the experts that was held on June 23–24, 2015, in Atlanta, Georgia, to seek their views on the evidence and draft recommendations and to better understand their premeeting ratings. CDC sought the experts' individual opinions at the meeting. Although there was widespread agreement on some of the recommendations, there was disagreement on others. Experts did not vote on the recommendations or seek to come to a consensus. Decisions about recommendations to be included in the guideline, and their rationale, were made by CDC.

Federal Partner Engagement

Given the scope of this guideline and the interest of agencies across the federal government in appropriate pain management, opioid prescribing, and related outcomes, CDC invited its National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and CDC's federal partners to observe the expert meeting, provide written comments on the full draft guideline after the meeting, and review the guideline through an agency clearance process; CDC reviewed comments and incorporated changes.

Interagency collaboration will be critical for translating these recommendations into clinical practice. Federal partners included representatives from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Defense, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), and the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Stakeholder Comment

Given the importance of the guideline for a wide variety of stakeholders, CDC also invited review from a Stakeholder Review Group (SRG) to provide comment so that CDC could consider modifications that would improve the recommendations' specificity, applicability, and ease of implementation. The SRG included representatives from professional organizations that represent specialties that commonly prescribe opioids (e.g., pain medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation), delivery systems within which opioid prescribing occurs (e.g., hospitals), and representation from community organizations with interests in pain management and opioid prescribing. Representatives from each of the SRG organizations were provided a copy of the guideline for comment. Each of these representatives provided written comments. Once input was received from the full SRG, CDC reviewed all comments and carefully considered them when revising the draft guideline.

Constituent Engagement

To obtain initial perspectives from constituents on the recommendation statements, including clinicians and prospective patients, CDC convened a constituent engagement webinar and circulated information about the webinar in advance through announcements to partners. CDC hosted the webinar on September 16 and 17, 2015, provided information about the methodology for developing the guideline, and presented the key recommendations. A fact sheet was posted on the CDC Injury Center Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/injury>) summarizing the guideline development process and clinical practice areas addressed in the guideline; instructions were included on how to submit comments via email. CDC received comments during and for 2 days following the first webinar. Over 1,200 constituent comments were received. Comments were reviewed and carefully considered when revising the draft guideline.

Peer Review

Per the final information quality bulletin for peer review (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/fy2005/m05-03.pdf>) , peer review requirements applied to this guideline because it provides influential scientific information that could have a clear and substantial impact on public- and private-sector decisions. Three experts independently reviewed the guideline to determine the reasonableness and strength of recommendations; the clarity with which scientific uncertainties were clearly identified; and the rationale, importance, clarity, and ease of implementation of the recommendations. CDC selected peer reviewers based on expertise, diversity of scientific viewpoints, and independence from the guideline development process. CDC assessed and managed potential conflicts of interest using a process similar to the one as described for solicitation of expert opinion. No financial interests were identified in the disclosure and review process, and nonfinancial activities were determined to be of minimal risk; thus, no significant conflict of interest concerns were identified. CDC placed the names of peer reviewers on the CDC and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) Peer Review Agenda Web sites that are used to provide information about the peer review of influential documents. CDC reviewed peer review comments and revised the draft guideline accordingly.

Public Comment

To obtain comments from the public on the full guideline, CDC published a notice in the *Federal Register* (80 FR 77351) announcing the availability of the guideline and the supporting clinical and contextual evidence reviews for public comment. The comment period closed January

13, 2016. CDC received more than 4,350 comments from the general public, including patients with chronic pain, clinicians, families who have lost loved ones to overdose, medical associations, professional organizations, academic institutions, state and local governments, and industry. CDC reviewed each of the comments and carefully considered them when revising the draft guideline.

Federal Advisory Committee Review and Recommendation

The NCIPC Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC) is a federal advisory committee that advises and makes recommendations to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Director of CDC, and the Director of NCIPC. The BSC makes recommendations regarding policies, strategies, objectives, and priorities, and reviews progress toward injury and violence prevention. CDC sought the BSC's advice on the draft guideline. BSC members are special government employees appointed as CDC advisory committee members; as such, all members completed an OGE Form 450 to disclose relevant interests. BSC members also reported on their disclosures during meetings. Disclosures for the BSC are reported in the guideline.

To assist in guideline review, on December 14, 2015, via Federal Register notice, CDC announced the intent to form an Opioid Guideline Workgroup (OGW) to provide observations on the draft guideline to the BSC. CDC provided the BSC with the draft guideline as well as summaries of comments provided to CDC by stakeholders, constituents, and peer reviewers, and edits made to the draft guideline in response. During an open meeting held on January 7, 2016, the BSC recommended the formation of the OGW. The OGW included a balance of perspectives from audiences directly affected by the guideline, audiences that would be directly involved with implementing the recommendations, and audiences qualified to provide representation. The OGW comprised clinicians, subject matter experts, and a patient representative, with the following perspectives represented: primary care, pain medicine, public health, behavioral health, substance abuse treatment, pharmacy, patients, and research. Additional sought-after attributes were appropriate academic and clinical training and relevant clinical experience; high scientific standing; and knowledge of the patient, clinician, and caregiver perspectives. In accordance with CDC policy, two BSC committee members also served as OGW members, with one serving as the OGW Chair. The professional credentials and interests of OGW members were carefully reviewed to identify possible conflicts of interest such as financial relationships with industry, intellectual preconceptions, or previously stated public positions. Only OGW members whose interests were determined to be minimal were selected. CDC and the OGW identified ad-hoc consultants to supplement the workgroup expertise, when needed, in the areas of pediatrics, occupational medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, medical ethics, addiction psychiatry, physical medicine and rehabilitation, guideline development methodology, and the perspective of a family member who lost a loved one to opioid use disorder or overdose.

The BSC charged the OGW with reviewing the quality of the clinical and contextual evidence reviews and reviewing each of the recommendation statements and accompanying rationales. For each recommendation statement, the OGW considered the quality of the evidence, the balance of benefits and risks, the values and preferences of clinicians and patients, the cost feasibility, and the category designation of the recommendation (A or B). The OGW also reviewed supplementary documents, including input provided by the CEG, SRG, peer reviewers, and the public. OGW members discussed the guideline accordingly during virtual meetings and drafted a summary report of members' observations, including points of agreement and disagreement, and delivered the report to the BSC.

NCIPC announced an open meeting of the NCIPC BSC in the Federal Register on January 11, 2016. The BSC met on January 28, 2016, to discuss the OGW report and deliberate on the draft guideline itself. Members of the public provided comments at this meeting. After discussing the OGW report, deliberating on specific issues about the draft guideline identified at the meeting, and hearing public comment, the BSC voted unanimously: to support the observations made by the OGW; that CDC adopt the guideline recommendations that, according to the workgroup's report, had unanimous or majority support; and that CDC further consider the guideline recommendations for which the group had mixed opinions. CDC carefully considered the OGW observations, public comments, and BSC recommendations, and revised the guideline in response.

Evidence Supporting the Recommendations

Type of Evidence Supporting the Recommendations

The type of supporting evidence is identified and graded for each recommendation (see the "Major Recommendations" field).

Benefits/Harms of Implementing the Guideline Recommendations

Potential Benefits

- Improved communication between clinicians and patients about the risks and benefits of opioid therapy for chronic pain, improved safety and effectiveness of pain treatment, and reduced risks associated with long-term opioid therapy, including opioid use disorder, overdose, and death
- Using guidelines to address problematic prescribing has the potential to optimize care and improve patient safety based on evidence-based practice, as well as reverse the cycle of opioid pain medication misuse that contributes to the opioid overdose epidemic.

Refer to the original guideline document and accompanying evidence reviews (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field) for detailed discussions of the benefits versus harms of specific recommendations.

Potential Harms

- Long-term opioid use is associated with increased risk of overdose, addiction, abuse, or misuse of opioids; increased risk of fractures; increased risk of myocardial infarction; and increased risk of endocrine dysfunction (e.g., erectile dysfunction and need for testosterone replacement). It is also associated with risky medication-related behaviors such as obtaining controlled medications from multiple prescribers and saving unused medications.
- Nonopioid pharmacologic approaches used for pain include analgesics such as acetaminophen, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and cyclooxygenase 2 (COX-2) inhibitors; selected anticonvulsants; and selected antidepressants (particularly tricyclics and serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors [SNRIs]). Multiple guidelines recommend acetaminophen as first-line pharmacotherapy for osteoarthritis or for low back pain but note that it should be avoided in liver failure and that dosage should be reduced in patients with hepatic insufficiency or a history of alcohol abuse. Although guidelines also recommend NSAIDs as first-line treatment for osteoarthritis or low back pain, NSAIDs and COX-2 inhibitors do have risks, including gastrointestinal bleeding or perforation as well as renal and cardiovascular risks. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently strengthened existing label warnings that NSAIDs increase risks for heart attack and stroke, including that these risks might increase with longer use or at higher doses. Epidural injection has been associated with rare but serious adverse events, including loss of vision, stroke, paralysis, and death.
- Common effects of opioids include such as constipation, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, confusion, tolerance, physical dependence, and withdrawal symptoms when stopping opioids.

Refer to the original guideline document and accompanying evidence reviews (see the "Availability of Companion Documents" field) for detailed discussions concerning the benefits and harms of specific recommendations as well as discussions concerning patient populations that are at greater risk for harms.

Contraindications

Contraindications

- Multiple guidelines recommend acetaminophen as first-line pharmacotherapy for osteoarthritis or for low back pain but note that it should be avoided in liver failure and that dosage should be reduced in patients with hepatic insufficiency or a history of alcohol abuse.
- Ultrarapid detoxification under anesthesia is associated with substantial risks, including death, and should not be used.
- Clinicians should avoid prescribing opioid pain medication and benzodiazepines concurrently whenever possible.
- Clinicians should avoid prescribing opioids to patients with moderate or severe sleep-disordered breathing whenever possible to minimize risks for opioid overdose.
- Neonatal toxicity and death have been reported in breastfeeding infants whose mothers are taking codeine; previous guidelines have recommended that codeine be avoided whenever possible among mothers who are breast feeding and, if used, should be limited to the lowest possible dose and to a 4-day supply.

Qualifying Statements

Qualifying Statements

- Clinical decision making should be based on a relationship between the clinician and patient, and an understanding of the patient's clinical situation, functioning, and life context. The recommendations in the guideline are voluntary, rather than prescriptive standards. They are

based on emerging evidence, including observational studies or randomized clinical trials with notable limitations. Clinicians should consider the circumstances and unique needs of each patient when providing care.

- The recommendations and all statements included in this guideline are those of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and do not necessarily represent the official position of any persons or organizations providing comments on the draft guideline.
- Use of trade names and commercial sources is for identification only and does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- References to non-CDC sites on the Internet are provided as a service to *MMWR* readers and do not constitute or imply endorsement of these organizations or their programs by CDC or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CDC is not responsible for the content of these sites. URL addresses listed in *MMWR* were current as of the date of publication.

Implementation of the Guideline

Description of Implementation Strategy

- Clinical guidelines represent one strategy for improving prescribing practices and health outcomes. Efforts are required to disseminate the guideline and achieve widespread adoption and implementation of the recommendations in clinical settings. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will translate this guideline into user-friendly materials for distribution and use by health systems, medical professional societies, insurers, public health departments, health information technology developers, and clinicians and engage in dissemination efforts. CDC has provided a checklist for prescribing opioids for chronic pain (<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/38025>), additional resources such as fact sheets (<http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prescribing/resources.html>), and will provide a mobile application to guide clinicians in implementing the recommendations. CDC will also work with partners to support clinician education on pain management options, opioid therapy, and risk mitigation strategies (e.g., urine drug testing). Activities such as development of clinical decision support in electronic health records to assist clinicians' treatment decisions at the point of care; identification of mechanisms that insurers and pharmacy benefit plan managers can use to promote safer prescribing within plans; and development of clinical quality improvement measures and initiatives to improve prescribing and patient care within health systems have promise for increasing guideline adoption and improving practice. In addition, policy initiatives that address barriers to implementation of the guidelines, such as increasing accessibility of prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) data within and across states, e-prescribing, and availability of clinicians who can offer medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder, are strategies to consider to enhance implementation of the recommended practices. CDC will work with federal partners and payers to evaluate strategies such as payment reform and health care delivery models that could improve patient health and safety. For example, strategies might include strengthened coverage for nonpharmacologic treatments, appropriate urine drug testing, and medication-assisted treatment; reimbursable time for patient counseling; and payment models that improve access to interdisciplinary, coordinated care.
- As highlighted in the forthcoming report on the National Pain Strategy, an overarching federal effort that outlines a comprehensive population-level health strategy for addressing pain as a public health problem, clinical guidelines complement other strategies aimed at preventing illnesses and injuries that lead to pain. A draft of the National Pain Strategy has been published previously. These strategies include strengthening the evidence base for pain prevention and treatment strategies, reducing disparities in pain treatment, improving service delivery and reimbursement, supporting professional education and training, and providing public education. It is important that overall improvements be made in developing the workforce to address pain management in general, in addition to opioid prescribing specifically. This guideline also complements other federal efforts focused on addressing the opioid overdose epidemic including prescriber training and education, improving access to treatment for opioid use disorder, safe storage and disposal programs, utilization management mechanisms, naloxone distribution programs, law enforcement and supply reduction efforts, prescription drug monitoring program improvements, and support for community coalitions and state prevention programs.

Implementation Tools

Chart Documentation/Checklists/Forms

Patient Resources

Resources

Wall Poster

Institute of Medicine (IOM) National Healthcare Quality Report Categories

IOM Care Need

Living with Illness

Staying Healthy

IOM Domain

Effectiveness

Patient-centeredness

Safety

Identifying Information and Availability

Bibliographic Source(s)

Dowell D, Haegerich TM, Chou R. CDC guideline for prescribing opioids for chronic pain - United States, 2016. MMWR Recomm Rep. 2016 Mar 18;65(1):1-49. [223 references] [PubMed](#)

Adaptation

Not applicable: The guideline was not adapted from another source.

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Guideline Developer(s)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Federal Government Agency [U.S.]

Source(s) of Funding

United States Government

Guideline Committee

Steering Committee

Core Expert Group

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Financial Disclosures/Conflicts of Interest

Prior to their participation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asked potential experts to reveal possible conflicts of interest such as financial relationships with industry, intellectual preconceptions, or previously stated public positions. Experts could not serve if they had conflicts that might have a direct and predictable effect on the recommendations. CDC excluded experts who had a financial or promotional relationship with a company that makes a product that might be affected by the guideline. CDC reviewed potential nonfinancial conflicts carefully (e.g., intellectual property, travel, public statements or positions such as congressional testimony) to determine if the activities would have a direct and predictable effect on the recommendations. CDC determined the risk of these types of activities to be minimal for the identified experts. All experts completed a statement certifying that there was no potential or actual conflict of interest. Activities that did not pose a conflict (e.g.,

participation in Food and Drug Administration [FDA] activities or other guideline efforts) are disclosed.

CDC selected peer reviewers based on expertise, diversity of scientific viewpoints, and independence from the guideline development process. CDC assessed and managed potential conflicts of interest using a process similar to the one as described for solicitation of expert opinion. No financial interests were identified in the disclosure and review process, and nonfinancial activities were determined to be of minimal risk; thus, no significant conflict of interest concerns were identified.

Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC) members are special government employees appointed as CDC advisory committee members; as such, all members completed an OGE Form 450 to disclose relevant interests. BSC members also reported on their disclosures during meetings.

The professional credentials and interests of the Opioid Workgroup (OGW) members were carefully reviewed to identify possible conflicts of interest such as financial relationships with industry, intellectual preconceptions, or previously stated public positions. Only OGW members whose interests were determined to be minimal were selected. When an activity was perceived as having the potential to affect a specific aspect of the recommendations, the activity was disclosed, and the OGW member was recused from discussions related to that specific aspect of the recommendations (e.g., urine drug testing and abuse-deterrent formulations).

Refer to the original guideline document for all reported disclosures.

Guideline Status

This is the current release of the guideline.

This guideline meets NGC's 2013 (revised) inclusion criteria.

Guideline Availability

Available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Web site](#) .

Availability of Companion Documents

The following are available:

- Clinical evidence review for the CDC guideline for prescribing opioids for chronic pain – United States, 2016. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2016. 25 p. Available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Web site](#) .
- Contextual evidence review for the CDC guideline for prescribing opioids for chronic pain – United States, 2016. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2016. 38 p. Available from the [CDC Web site](#) .
- Chou R, Deyo R, Devine B, Hansen R, Sullivan S, Jarvik JG, Blazina I, Dana T, Bougatsos C, Turner J. The effectiveness and risks of long-term opioid treatment of chronic pain. Evidence Report/Technology Assessment No. 218. (Prepared by the Pacific Northwest Evidence-based Practice Center under Contract No. 290-2012-00014-I.) AHRQ Publication No. 14-E005-EF. Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2014 Sep. 219 p. Available from the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \(AHRQ\) Web site](#) .

Additional resources related to the guideline, including checklists, posters, and dose calculation tools, are available from the [CDC Web site](#) .

Patient Resources

A variety of resources that will help improve communication between providers and patients about the risks and benefits of opioid therapy for chronic pain, improve the safety and effectiveness of pain treatment, and reduce the risks associated with long-term opioid therapy are available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Web site](#) .

NGC Status

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