

Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network

“Suboxone”

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Continuing Increases in the Diversion of Suboxone®

John R. Kasich, Governor
Orman Hall, Director

Federally supported research studies have shown that the most efficacious treatment for opiate dependence are programs that utilize Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), an evidence-based best practice that couples pharmacotherapies with behavioral therapies (Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment, NIDA, 2009). In 2002, the FDA approved Subutex® and Suboxone® for MAT, both Schedule III narcotics under the Controlled Substances Act. Subutex® contains buprenorphine only while Suboxone® contains buprenorphine and the opiate antagonist, naloxone. If injected by someone dependent on opioids, the naloxone in Suboxone® produces withdrawal and may diminish abuse among injectors. Both drugs are administered sublingually (dissolved under the tongue) as prescribed and are available in 2 mg and 8 mg tablets.

Misuse and abuse of these medications have been widely documented by U.S. and international researchers alike. However, researchers Smith, Bailey, Woody and Kleber^[1] conclude in their 2007 study, “Abuse of Buprenorphine in the United States,” the level of misuse and abuse of buprenorphine is low relative to the number of prescriptions filled. In Ohio, illicit use and diversion of Suboxone® has generally been more common than that of Subutex. ODADAS is committed to educating treatment providers and professionals on the value of MAT and the importance of pairing MAT with evidence-based psychosocial therapies designed to safeguard the patient and ensure successful treatment outcomes.

Initial OSAM Network reports of street availability of Suboxone® were obtained in Columbus in 2005. Since then, gradual increases in the diversion of Suboxone® have been reported by users in most areas of the state (Table 1). Current availability of Suboxone® is moderate to high in all regions. During the past six months, increases in availability exist for Akron-Canton, Athens and Cincinnati; likely increases exist for Columbus, Dayton and Youngstown. In Akron-Canton and Columbus, participants and community professionals noted that Suboxone® is being prescribed more often, citing the emergence of Suboxone® clinics in these regions. Law enforcement in Cincinnati noted an increase in doctors writing for off-label use of Suboxone® for pain to get past the 100-patient limit for addiction treatment. While many participants reported taking Suboxone® as prescribed, some continued to report trading the drug for heroin or other drugs. Current street jargon for Suboxone® includes “boxon’s,” “strips,” “stop signs” and “subs.”

Participants reported that a Suboxone® 8 mg tablet sells for between \$5-20; Suboxone® 8 mg strips sell for between \$10-20 per strip. The vast majority of participants continued to report most often taking Suboxone® sublingually; snorting and intravenous injection as routes of administration are considerably less frequent. In addition to obtaining Suboxone® on the street from dealers, participants also reported getting the drug from clinics, doctors, online pharmacies or through purchase from people who are legitimately prescribed them. Those most typically abusing Suboxone® are heroin users; they do not want to get sick and need Suboxone® for when they cannot obtain heroin. Reportedly, when used in combination with other substances, Suboxone® is used with alcohol, crack cocaine, marijuana and sedative-hypnotics. Many participants agreed that Xanax® is commonly used in combination with Suboxone®.

¹ Smith, M. Y., Bailey, J. E., Woody, G. E., & Kleber, H. D. (2007). Abuse of Buprenorphine in the United States. *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 26(3), 107-111.



Department of Alcohol &
Drug Addiction Services



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Continuing Increases in the Diversion of Suboxone®, cont'd.

Table 1: Street Availability of Diverted Suboxone® According to Users

Region	Jun-05	Jan-06	Jun-06	Jan-07	Jun-07	Jan-08	Jun-08	Jan-09	Jan-11*	Jun-11	Jan-12	Jun-12
Akron/Canton						Low			Mod	High	High	High
Athens								High	High	High	High	High
Cincinnati			Low	Low	Low	Low		Mod	Mod	High	High	High
Cleveland				Low		High	High	Low	High	High	Mod	High
Columbus	Low	Low	Low	Low		Low			High	High	Mod	Mod
Dayton				Low	Low		Mod	Mod	High	High	Mod	Mod
Toledo					Low	Mod		Low	Mod	Mod	High	High
Youngstown						Mod	Mod	Mod	High	High	High	High

*OSAM was discontinued from June of 2009 to June of 2010

