

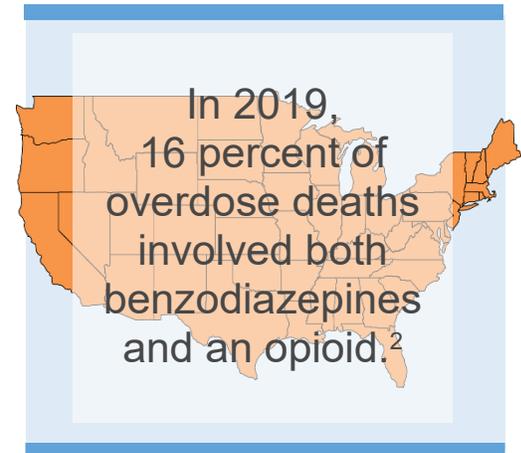
High-Risk Medications

Opioids: Strong Warnings Against Combining Opioids for Pain, Cough Medicines, and Benzodiazepines

We know that opioids are used to treat pain while benzodiazepines are used to treat anxiety, insomnia, and seizures. But did you know that some prescription cough syrups also contain opioids? What happens when a patient who routinely takes Ativan for anxiety—and also has COVID-19—is now taking “the cough syrup the doctor prescribed?” If that cough syrup has codeine in it, the results could be disastrous and even life threatening because it is combining an opioid and benzodiazepine. This is so serious that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now requires its strongest warning, called a Boxed Warning, to be used.¹

So, what can we do about this?

You may not quickly recognize the names of the most commonly prescribed opioids and benzodiazepines. To assist you, use the pocket-card list below and distribute it to your staff members. When medication reconciliation or medication administration is occurring, healthcare providers should be aware of the listed medications and verify that the two drugs are needed. If the prescriber does verify that they want the opioid and benzodiazepine to be given, then provide education to the patient or their family member about the risks of respiratory depression and sedation if opioids are used with benzodiazepines, alcohol, or other central nervous system (CNS) depressants (including illicit or recreational drugs).



| Generic Name | Brand Name(s) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Benzodiazepines | |
| Commonly Used for Anxiety | |
| Alprazolam | Xanax, Xanax XR |
| Diazepam | Valium, Diastat |
| Clonazepam | Klonopin |
| Chlordiazepoxide | Librium, Librax |
| Lorazepam | Ativan |
| Commonly Used as Sleeping Aids | |
| Flurazepam | Dalmane |
| Triazolam | Halcion |
| Temazepam | Restoril |

| Generic Name | Brand Name(s) |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Opioids | |
| Hydrocodone containing acetaminophen | Vicodin, Lortab, Norco, Lorcet |
| Oxycodone with acetaminophen | Percocet |
| Oxycodone with aspirin | Percodan |
| Oxycodone Hydrochloride (HCL) | OxyContin |
| Codeine containing acetaminophen | Tylenol #3 and #4 |
| Morphine | Kadian, MS Contin |
| Dilaudid | Hydromorphone HCL |
| Meperidine | Demerol |
| Cough medicines with Opioids | Hycodan, Robitussin AC, Tussionex |

1. FDA Drug Safety Communication: FDA warns about serious risks and death when combining opioid pain or cough medicines with benzodiazepines; requires its strongest warning. https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm518473.htm?source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery
 2. National Institute on Drug Abuse: Benzodiazepines and Opioids. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/opioids/benzodiazepines-opioids>