

Prerequisites for OxyContin prescriptions get tougher

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The province is introducing new safeguards against the misuse of the powerful and addictive painkiller OxyContin. Beginning Friday, new prescriptions for the drug will be restricted to cancer patients or those with chronic conditions who have a history of being unable to tolerate or receive benefit from other medications.

Doctors will also need to contact the Exception Drug Status Office of the provincial Health Department for approval before patients can obtain pharmacare coverage in purchasing the drug.

There will be a two-month grace period from the new rules for patients who are already taking OxyContin. They will have to meet the new criteria by May 26.

The new rules are based on the recommendations of a provincial expert group that included physicians, justice officials and representatives of addictions treatment organizations.

The province also announced that it will launch an OxyContin education campaign and fund training to increase the number of doctors with a methadone licence.

OxyContin is a form of opioid. People who take these drugs can develop tolerance rapidly, making higher doses necessary to maintain their effect. They are highly addictive and misuse can lead to dependence.