



**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
**Executive Office of Health and Human Services**  
**Department of Public Health**  
**Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality**  
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CHERYL BARTLETT, RN  
COMMISSIONER

**Circular Letter: DHCQ 14-3-610**

**TO:** Massachusetts Controlled Substance Registrants

**FROM:** Deborah Allwes, BS, BSN, RN, MPH, Director of Prescription Monitoring and Drug Control

**DATE:** March 31, 2014

**RE:** Prohibition of prescribing and dispensing of any hydrocodone bitartrate product in hydrocodone-only extended-release formulation

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**Introduction**

The Governor of the Commonwealth has determined that an emergency exists which is detrimental to the public health with respect to the number of opiate-related overdoses and amount of opiate addiction in the Commonwealth.

The Department notes that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently approved a new medication which consists entirely of hydrocodone in higher levels than any currently available hydrocodone combination product. This hydrocodone-only extended release product is not in an abuse-deterrent formulation.<sup>1</sup> The Department is concerned about the high likelihood of misuse, diversion and abuse of the medication, further adding to the opiate abuse epidemic and increasing the likelihood of additional opiate-related overdoses.

In response to the Governor's Declaration, and with the approval of the Public Health Council on March 27, 2014, Cheryl Bartlett, the Commissioner of Public Health, issued the following emergency order:

No registered individual practitioner shall prescribe or order, and no one shall dispense or administer any hydrocodone bitartrate product in hydrocodone-only extended-release formulation until the Commissioner has determined that adequate measures are in place to safeguard against the potential for diversion, overdose and abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> "Abuse-deterrent formulation" means an FDA-approved formulation of a controlled substance that targets known or expected routes of abuse for that formulation.

This order will protect against overdose and abuse of hydrocodone-only extended-release formulation until such time as there are adequate safety measures in place. The Department will notify all registrants when this prohibition is lifted.

**Question:** What providers are covered under this order?

**Answer:** All registered individual providers and all practitioners with a Massachusetts Controlled Substance Registration (MCSR), as defined in 105 CMR 700.001 *et seq.*

**Question:** I am a provider in Massachusetts providing care to a patient who resides in another state. Can I write a prescription for hydrocodone-only extended release to be filled in another state?

**Answer:** No. The order states that no provider registered in Massachusetts shall prescribe any hydrocodone bitartrate product in hydrocodone-only extended-release formulation in Massachusetts.

**Question:** I am a physician in a hospital or extended care facility. Can I order hydrocodone-only extended release for an admitted patient under my care?

**Answer:** No. The order states that no registered individual practitioner shall prescribe or order, and no one shall dispense or administer any hydrocodone bitartrate product in hydrocodone-only extended-release formulation.

**Question:** Can a pharmacy in Massachusetts fill a prescription for hydrocodone-only extended release that is from a neighboring state?

**Answer:** No. Hydrocodone-only extended release products may not be dispensed in Massachusetts.

**Question:** May I continue to prescribe and dispense other opiate medications?

**Answer:** Yes. This emergency order only applies to the new hydrocodone-only extended release product. It does not affect your ability to prescribe and dispense other opiate medications.

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact:

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