



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Dear Colleague:

We are facing a crisis in drug overdose deaths in Philadelphia. There were 1,150 overdose deaths in 2019, an increase from the 1,117 people who died the year prior. Over eighty percent of these overdose deaths involved opioids, including prescription opioids, heroin and fentanyl.

Nationally, 4 out of 5 heroin users start with prescription opioids. Yet despite the risks associated with prescription opioids, patients continue to be prescribed much more than they need. Opioid prescribing in Philadelphia remains well-above the levels prescribed in the 1990s and early 2000s.

To respond to this crisis, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) has launched THINK NSAIDS, a campaign to encourage health care providers to prescribe opioids to fewer patients, in smaller amounts and for shorter periods of time.

I ask you to review the enclosed materials and follow the City's guidelines when prescribing opioids and benzodiazepines. These recommendations are based on evidence-based guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and specifically include these key recommendations:

- Do not prescribe opioids for **chronic pain**.
- **3 days or less** is usually sufficient for acute pain.
- Prescribe the **lowest effective dose** and avoid increasing dose to ≥ 90 MME/day.
- **Avoid concurrent** benzodiazepine and opioid prescribing.

You can find additional information on opioids and opioid prescribing on our website at <https://www.phila.gov/opioids>

Thanks in advance for your help in combatting this crisis.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Farley, MD, MPH

Commissioner

Philadelphia Department of Public Health