



Department of Health

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Dear Colleague:

Greetings, and welcome to my September letter. This month, I'd like to tell you about a new tool in the fight against opioid addiction and remind you of a new immunization requirement for adolescents. I'd also like to extend a special invitation.

Medication-assisted Treatment (MAT): As you probably know, drug overdoses involving opioid analgesics and heroin have been on the rise in recent years, both around the country and in New York State. Opioid addiction is a chronic disease, not a weakness or moral flaw. Like other chronic diseases, opioid addiction may require medication. That's why I'm enlisting your help. Physicians have the opportunity to help us reverse this cycle of addiction by employing one of the most effective tools we have: medication-assisted treatment. MAT uses a safe, controlled amount of medication -- buprenorphine, naltrexone and methadone -- to help people overcome their addiction.

Unfortunately, we don't have enough physicians prescribing these medications for opioid addiction. That's why I'm urging all doctors in New York to consider taking advantage of Drug Addiction Treatment Act (DATA) 2000 waiver trainings, the federal government's free MAT training, offered through the Providers Clinical Support System for MAT (www.PCSSMAT.org). Qualified physicians who receive the training are then certified to treat up to 30 patients in the first year and up to 100 in the subsequent years. As of August 2016, practitioners who hold additional credentialing or practice in qualified practice settings, as defined by the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([click here for details](#)), may now treat up to 275 patients per year.

As physicians, you play a critical role in our quest to end the opioid epidemic. The federal government recently began working toward changes in the law that will allow nurse practitioners and physician assistants to also prescribe these life-saving medications; but right now, only physicians can do so. We must ensure that all New Yorkers who need MAT have access to a trained physician who is available and able to guide them through the use of this life-saving treatment. Please consider getting certified. Additional resources for physicians interested in prescribing buprenorphine are available through the New York State Department of Health. For more information please email: buprenorphine@health.ny.gov.

Childhood Vaccines: As children head back to school, it's a good time to remind parents that their children, even adolescents, need to be properly immunized. This year, a new law requires children entering 7th and 12th grades to receive the meningococcal ACWY (MenACWY) vaccine. New York is now one of 27 states that require meningococcal vaccination for school attendance. For most children, their age upon entering 7th and 12th grades aligns with the ages that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the 1st and 2nd doses

of the vaccine be administered. A summary of all vaccine requirements by grade is available online here: <http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2370.pdf>.

Finally, I want to invite you to our next session of the Commissioner's Medical Grand Rounds, ***From A to Zika: A Zika Virus Update for Primary Care Providers***. New York State, followed by Florida, has the highest number of reported Zika cases in the U.S. So far, no mosquito-borne transmission of Zika has been reported in New York. I hope you'll join us to learn about the latest emerging trends about Zika virus, maternal/fetal risks, and evidence-based guidelines, strategies, and best practices for testing, evaluation, and patient care. **The event will take place on Thursday, September 29 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Stony Brook Medical in Long Island and will also be available via live webcast.** Attendance is free for all providers in New York and participants are eligible for CME credits. Advanced registration is requested at: www.health.ny.gov/commissioner/grand_rounds/a_to_zika/.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.