



How COVID-19 is Impacting People with Substance Use Disorders

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Learning Objectives

1. Recognize challenges that may be magnified for people with substance use disorders during a pandemic, as well as the impact on families and children
2. Identify risk factors and warning signs for problematic substance use, and recognize symptoms that might warrant medical intervention and/or referral to a higher level of care
3. Become familiar with ways to help people with substance use disorders during a pandemic, including utilization of virtual resources

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Objective 1: Challenges for people with SUD (and their families) during the pandemic

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The Challenge:
SUD = ↑ Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities



Housing
insecurity



Transportation



Incarceration



Financial
instability



Support network
fragility

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The Challenge: SUD = ↑ Access and Medical Vulnerabilities



Access to care

- ↓ clinic/program availability
 - (# people served, # new intakes,
 - ↓ MAT initiation for OUD)
- Lack of tech access
 - (↓ participation in telehealth)



Substance-specific problems

- Tobacco/cannabis/crack/meth/anything smoked – decreased lung function, HTN
 - Opioids – respiratory suppression, infection risks, heart disease
- Alcohol – weakened immune system, ↓ inhibition = ↑ risk-taking behaviors

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Utilization Challenges



- Physical distancing
 - Less likely to go to ED, doctor appts, therapy appts, pharmacy, etc
 - Not presenting for drug testing
 - 12-step and other support groups moved online/phone
- Stigma
 - Treatment avoidance
 - Social isolation

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MAT and Harm-reduction Challenges

- Closure of needle exchange and other harm reduction programs
- ↓ MAT initiation for OUD
- Meds
 - “Stretch out” meds
 - Taking more than prescribed
 - Selling/diverting

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Overdose

- Decreased distribution of naloxone
- More likely to be using alone
- No one there to provide naloxone in the case of overdose



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Family Challenges

- ↑ child and partner abuse
 - ↑ stress = major predictor of abuse (and neglect)
 - Teachers, counselors, other reporters not seeing signs of abuse
- Strained social resources
 - Fewer child protection workers on the job
 - Fewer home visits, assessments, etc

-- APA (2020) "How COVID-19 may increase domestic violence and child abuse"

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Family Challenges

- Social distancing
 - Triggers feelings of boredom, loneliness, anxiety, depression
 - ↓ coping skills and ↑ emotional distress
 - Often followed by shame for not "handling it better"
- Fewer social support mechanisms due to social distancing
 - Extended family
 - Religious groups
 - Community organizations
 - Child care/schools

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Addiction Policy Forum Survey

*Study conducted with contract funding from the
National Institute on Drug Abuse

- Web-based surveys* completed between April 27 and May 8, 2020
- 1,079 people with SUD and their family members
 - 20% reported increased substance use since the pandemic began
 - 4% reported an overdose since the pandemic began
 - 34% reported disruptions in access to treatment or recovery services
 - 87% of those reporting access disruptions report emotional changes of worry, sadness, fear, and/or loneliness (vs 72% of those who did not report disruptions)

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Federal Guidance during COVID-19

SAMHSA – relaxed dosing guidelines allowing up to 28 days of take-home methadone doses for stable patients (up to 14 for less stable)

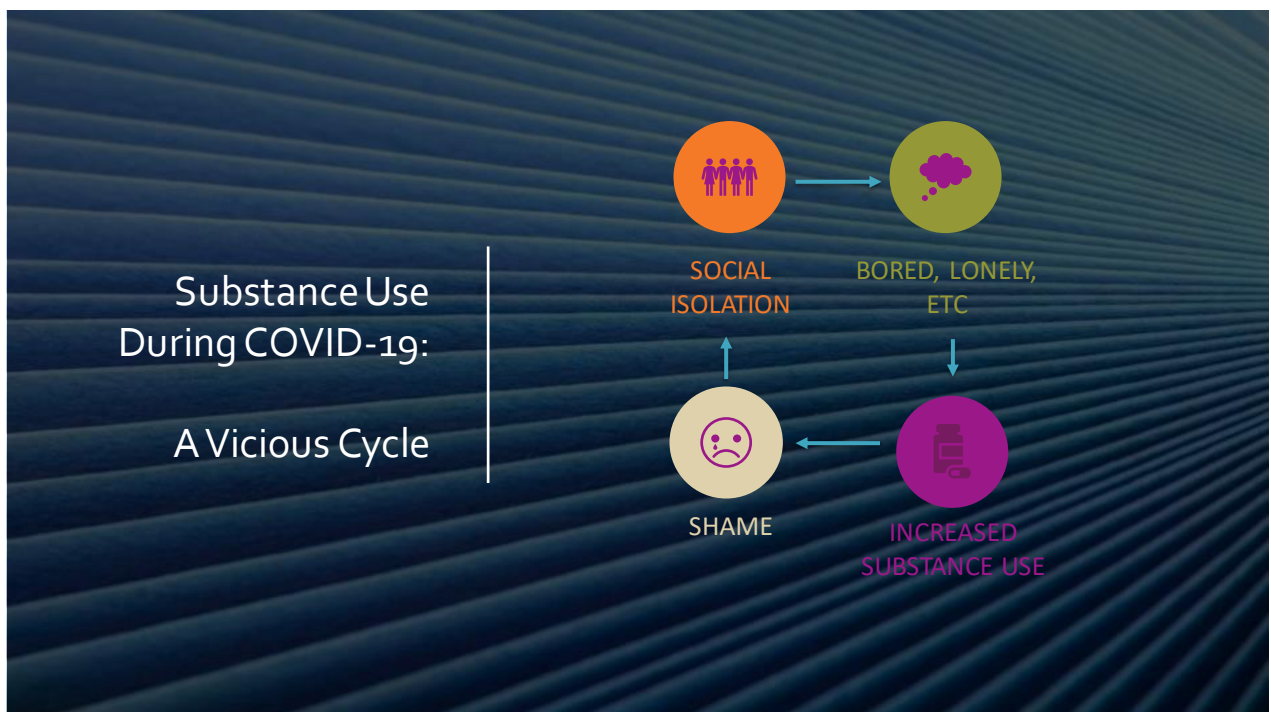
DHHS – waiver of HIPAA penalties for use of non-compliant technologies

DEA – allow phone evaluation for new initiation of buprenorphine treatment

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Objective 2: Identification of Problematic Substance Use

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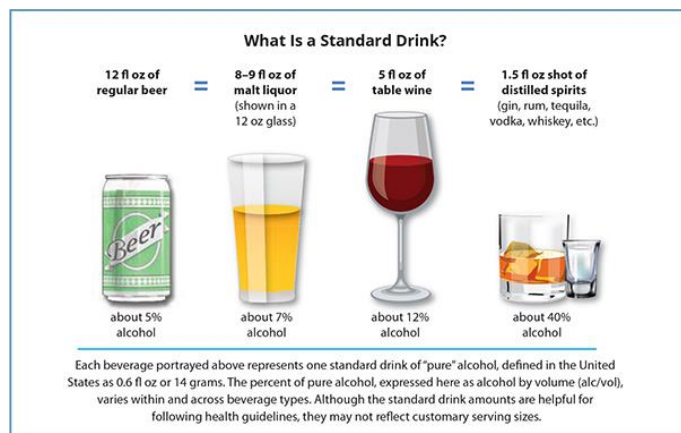
How much is too much?

- What substance?
- Known SUD?
- Other medical concerns?



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What is a
"drink?"



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Recommended Limits for Alcohol Consumption: World Health Organization (WHO)



- Not more than 2 drinks per day
- Not more than 7 drinks per week
- **No** alcohol use at least 2 d/wk

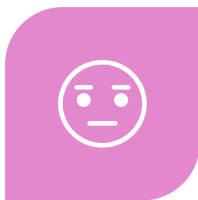


- Not more than 4 drinks per day
- Not more than 14 drinks per week
- **No** alcohol use at least 2 d/wk

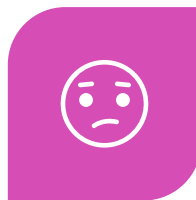
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Alcohol Withdrawal



MILD – ANXIETY,
INSOMNIA, TREMORS



MODERATE – SWEATING,
RAPID HEARTBEAT, FEVER,
NAUSEA



SEVERE – CONFUSION,
HALLUCINATIONS,
SEIZURES

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Risk Factors for ↑ Withdrawal Severity



Previous withdrawal sx



History of seizures



History of delirium tremens (“DTs”)



History of blackouts while intoxicated



Concurrent use of sedating medications

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Objective 3: Resources and How to Help

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How Can I Help People with SUD during COVID-19?

Encourage Connection

- Check in regularly
- Phone
- Video chats

Encourage Precautions

- Handwashing
- Mask-wearing
- Physical distancing

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How Can I Help People with SUD during COVID-19?

Encourage Safety

- Don't use alone
- Make sure naloxone and fentanyl testing strips on-hand
- Don't share supplies
- Use meds as prescribed

Encourage Social Supports

- Virtual 12-step meetings and other recovery resources
- Don't skip medical or therapy appointments

<https://harmreduction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19-safer-drug-use-1.pdf>

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Virtual Resources

- **Get Help Now PA hotline • 1-800-662-HELP (4357):** 24/7 hotline staffed by professionals who stay on the phone until a treatment provider is identified; other options are text 717-216-0905 and [chat](#)
- **Providers Clinical Support System:** evidence-based resources for opioid use disorders, including [COVID-19 resources](#)
- **ASAM COVID-19 Resources:** including searchable database of specialists, access to treatment, telehealth, MAT, adjusting drug testing protocols, infection mitigation, and national and state guidelines
- **APA Practice Guidance for COVID-19:** includes updated federal- and state-issued guidance for working with patients with substance use disorders

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Online Recovery Resources

12-step

- AA [pghaa.org](#), [aa-intergroup.org](#), [onlinegroupaa.org](#), [aaonlinemeeting.net](#)
- NA [virtual-na.org](#)
- Dual recovery [draonline.org/dual_diagnosis](#)

Non-12-step

- SMART Recovery [smartrecovery.org](#)
- Lifering [lifering.org/online-meetings](#)

Family resources

- Bridge to Hope [bridge2hope.org](#)
- Families Anonymous [familiesanonymous.org](#)
- Al-anon/Al-ateen [Al-anon.org](#)
- Nar-anon [Nar-anon.org](#)

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Responding to Challenges: Taking Care of the Children

- Educate yourself and the public to stay on the alert for abuse
- Stay connected and check on clients, ask about how they are coping
- Check on children (yourself or using social resources)
- Remind mandated reporters they can help prevent abuse by maintaining connections
- Remind mandated reporters about the need to report if noticing signs of abuse in virtual contacts
- Send stress management resources to parents
 - <https://cdn2.zeroabuseproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Responding-to-Child-Abuse-During-a-Pandemic-2.pdf>
 - <https://www.ddap.pa.gov/Get%20Help%20Now/Pages/COVID-19-Information-for-Families.aspx>

<https://preventchildabuse.org/coronavirus-resources/>

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Domestic Violence Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline Staying Safe During COVID-19 Phone number: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) • <https://www.thehotline.org/2020/03/13/staying-safe-during-covid-19/>

The National Network to Eliminate Domestic Violence Resources on the Response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) • https://nnedv.org/latest_update/resources-response-coronavirus-covid-19/

Department of Justice, Office of Women's Health Local Resources on Domestic Violence • <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/local-resources>

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Q&A



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