

# Disparities in filled buprenorphine prescriptions worse during pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic was associated with immediate decreases in

filled buprenorphine prescriptions by members of racial- and ethnic-minority groups but not White patients, according to a study published online June 1 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Thuy Nguyen, Ph.D., from University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and colleagues examined whether filled buprenorphine and naltrexone prescriptions for opioid use disorder varied across racial and [ethnic groups](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis included retail pharmacy claims (May 2019 to June 2021) identified from the Symphony Health database (nearly 1.56 million individuals who filled buprenorphine prescriptions).

The researchers found that prepandemic increases in the buprenorphine fill rate flattened for all groups after COVID-19 onset (30.5 percentage point difference in trend). However, significant decreases in buprenorphine fills at pandemic onset were seen for members of racial- and ethnic-minority groups but not White patients (ranging from 2.5 percent for Black patients to 4.0 percent for Hispanic patients). While the rate of buprenorphine fills decreased for Medicare and cash-paying patients, greater decreases were seen for Black patients (Medicare: 10.0 percent; cash: 20.0 percent) versus White patients (Medicare: 3.5 percent; cash: 15.0 percent). Medicaid patients did not experience decreases. For extended-release naltrexone, uniform level decreases were seen across groups.

"The COVID-19 pandemic may have been associated with exacerbated financial barriers to buprenorphine and naltrexone for [opioid use disorder](#) among racial and ethnic minority groups, who have experienced greater economic losses during the pandemic," the authors write.

**More information:** Thuy Nguyen et al, Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Buprenorphine and Extended-Release Naltrexone Filled Prescriptions During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *JAMA Network Open* (2022). [DOI:](#)

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