

Contact tracing helps methadone program expand

A methadone delivery program recently launched by the city Health Department and the state Office of Addiction Services and Supports is expanding, aided in part by the city's contact-tracing efforts.

To date Covid-19-positive and symptomatic patients have been referred to the program by the medical director of their opioid-treatment program or staff at isolation hotels. Now patients who have been informed by contact tracers of a potential exposure and the need to self-isolate for 14 days will be able to receive their medication for opioid-use disorder via courier.

"Those two systems working together is really important," said Allegra Schorr, president of the Coalition of Medication Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State, of methadone delivery and contact tracing.

The program also will be expanding to include patients who are earlier in treatment and less stable, and may need more frequent deliveries, Schorr said.

The methadone delivery program—which has the capacity to make some 1,300 deliveries a month—is important to minimizing potential Covid-19 exposure and ensuring access to medication-assisted treatment for substance-use disorder during the pandemic, the city and health experts have said.

"For patients to have the ability to get the medication they need and to not have to be put in a situation where they're exposed, it's certainly relieving for them, and it's a huge public health benefit," Schorr said.

That includes helping to reduce an unnecessary burden on the health care system during a pandemic by maintaining access to evidence-based opioid-use-disorder treatment, she said.

The program is expected to continue to ramp up ahead of what could be another wave of infections in the city.

"This delivery system is really timely because we're all aware that there's a very good chance that we do need to have it ramped up and ready," Schorr said. "We probably have not seen the end of [Covid-19] at this point."