



When is Telehealth Treatment for Substance Abuse Disorder Appropriate?

James Nichols, Zach Sneed, Ph.D, Milcah Poothakary, Edwin Paul, Kelly Munoz, Caroline Bowers, Rachel Flores, Lekha George, MD, Ariel Santos, MD

Acute Intoxication/Withdrawal potential	Biomedical Conditions/Complications	Emotional, Behavioral, or Cognitive Conditions	Recovery/Living Environment
• Mild-Moderate (CIWA-Ar score 9-19) withdrawal severity • No physiological dependence on opioids or BZDs • No severe withdrawal episode within the past year  Appropriate for Telehealth treatment	• Normal clinical lab results • No history of epilepsy/non-alcohol related seizures • Able to take oral medications at home • No concurring chronic medical conditions  Appropriate for Telehealth treatment	• Mild/stable psychiatric symptoms • No suicidal ideation/self harm risk • No signs of psychosis • Mild cognitive impairment  Appropriate for Telehealth treatment	• Evidence of reliable support network (friends/family, support groups) • Access to technology necessary for telehealth visits • Ability for privacy and trust during telehealth sessions  Appropriate for Telehealth treatment
• Severe (CIWA-Ar score ≥ 20) withdrawal severity • Physiological dependence on opioids and/or BZDs • Recent severe withdrawal episode within the past year  In person treatment recommended	• Clinically significant abnormal lab results • History of epilepsy/non-alcohol related seizures • Unable to take oral medications • Moderate-severe active potentially destabilizing medical problem • Suspected head injury  In person treatment recommended	• Moderate-severe psychiatric symptoms • Current suicidal ideation/self harm risk • Positive signs of psychosis • Moderate-severe cognitive impairment  In person treatment recommended	• Absence of reliable support network • Friends/family not supportive of treatment process • Lack of technology/stable internet connections • Lack of private or safe environment for telehealth sessions  In person treatment recommended

1. The ASAM Clinical Practice Guideline on Alcohol Withdrawal Management. Journal of Addiction Medicine 14(3S):p 1-72, May/June 2020. | DOI: 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000668
2. American Society of Addiction Medicine. (2022, October 2). Public policy statement on optimizing telehealth access to addiction care. Optimizing-telehealth-access-to-addiction-care
3. Cantor J, McBain RK, Kofner A, Hanson R, Stein BD, Yu H. (2022). Telehealth Adoption by Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Treatment Facilities in the COVID-19 Pandemic. Psychiatr Serv. 2022; 73(4):411-417. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.202100191

