

REVERSING OPIOID OVERDOSES WITH LIFESAVING NALOXONE

WHAT IS NALOXONE?

Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can reverse an overdose from opioids, including heroin, fentanyl, and prescription opioid medications.¹ Often given as a nasal spray, naloxone is safe and easy to use.

HOW DOES NALOXONE WORK AND HOW DO YOU USE IT?

Naloxone quickly reverses an overdose by blocking the effects of opioids. It can restore normal breathing within 2 to 3 minutes² in a person whose breath has slowed, or even stopped, as a result of opioid overdose. More than one dose of naloxone may be required when stronger opioids like fentanyl are involved.³

Naloxone is easy to use and light to carry. There are two forms of naloxone that anyone can use without medical training or authorization:



Nasal spray - Prefilled devices that spray medication into the nose.



Auto-injector - Prefilled devices that inject medication into the outer thigh. *(These devices deliver verbal instructions when activated.)*

If you give someone naloxone, stay with them until emergency help arrives or for at least four hours to make sure their breathing returns to normal.³ Good Samaritan laws are in place in most states to protect those who are overdosing and anyone assisting them in an emergency from arrest, charges, or a combination of these. **Learn about the laws in your state.**

WHY CARRY NALOXONE

Naloxone saves lives.

50,000

Nearly 50,000 people died from an opioid-involved overdose in 2019.⁴ One study found that bystanders were present in more than one in three overdoses involving opioids.⁴

With the right tools, bystanders can act to prevent overdose deaths. Anyone can carry naloxone, give it to someone experiencing an overdose, and potentially save a life. Naloxone won't harm someone³ if they're overdosing on drugs other than opioids, so it's always best to use it if you think someone is overdosing.

WHO SHOULD CARRY NALOXONE?

If you or someone you know is at increased risk for opioid overdose, especially those struggling with opioid use disorder (OUD), you should carry naloxone and keep it at home. People who are taking high-dose opioid medications (greater or equal to 50 morphine milligram equivalents per day) prescribed by a doctor, people who use opioids and benzodiazepines together, and people who use illicit opioids like heroin should all carry naloxone. Because you can't use naloxone on yourself, let others know you have it in case you experience an opioid overdose.

Carrying naloxone is no different than carrying an epinephrine auto-injector (commonly known by the brand name EpiPen) for someone with allergies. It simply provides an extra layer of protection for those at a higher risk for overdose.



80% of overdose deaths occurred inside a home.*



In nearly 40% of overdose deaths, someone else was present.⁵

Having naloxone available allows those bystanders to help a fatal overdose and save lives.

NALOXONE IS AVAILABLE IN YOUR STATE

Naloxone is available in all 50 states. If you have been prescribed high-dose opioids, talk to your doctor about co-prescribing naloxone. However, in most states, you can get naloxone at your local pharmacy without a prescription.¹ You can also get naloxone from community-based naloxone programs and most syringe services programs.

People who have overdosed before are more likely to overdose again.

SIGNS OF OPIOID OVERDOSE

Recognizing the signs of opioid overdose can save a life. Here are some things to look for:

- Small, constricted “pinpoint pupils”
- Falling asleep or losing consciousness
- Slow, weak, or no breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds
- Limp body
- Cold and/or clammy skin
- Discolored skin (especially in lips and nails)

WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK SOMEONE IS OVERDOSING

It may be hard to tell whether a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you aren't sure, it's best to treat the situation like an overdose—you could save a life.

1

Call 911 immediately.**

2

Administer naloxone, if available.

3

Try to keep the person awake and breathing.

4

Lay the person on their side to prevent choking.

5

Stay with them until emergency workers arrive.

1. Life-Saving Naloxone from Pharmacies. (2019). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/naloxone/index.html>

2. Harm Reduction TO – Naloxone: Overdose Reversal <https://harmreductionto.ca/naloxone>

3. Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit. (2018). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma18-4742.pdf>

4. National Institutes on Health: National Institute on Drug Abuse: Overdose Death Rates <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>

5. O'Donnell J, Gladden RM, Mattson CL, Hunter CT, Davis NL. Vital Signs: Characteristics of Drug Overdose Deaths Involving Opioids and Stimulants – 24 States and the District of Columbia, January–June 2019. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:1189–1197. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6935a1>

*Based on CDC Vital Signs report.

**Most states have laws that protect a person who is overdosing or the person who called for help from legal trouble.

