



First Aid and Injury Prevention Series

Opioid Overdose

How to Administer Naloxone to Someone Experiencing an Overdose



Opioids are a class of medication, both available for prescription as an extreme form of pain management after complex surgery or to off-set pain from serious chronic illness, and as an illicit substance. Although opioids do have a legitimate use, they may be highly addictive, and taking opioids improperly or at too high a quantity may result in an overdose – a life-threatening condition. According to the CDC, over 106,000 people in the U.S. died of an overdose in 2021. The article below will teach you about how to spot an overdose, and how to administer Naloxone – a drug used to treat and counteract an overdose.

This month's health tips are the continuation of a series. For this month and the next few months, we will be presenting you with common injuries you might encounter. This series will teach you the basic of how to lower your chances of these injuries, as well as some basic first aid so you can care for someone (or yourself) if you suffer these injuries. Please note that these health tips are for educational purposes only and are no replacement for a formal First Aid course or training.

How to Spot an Overdose

Opioids assist in pain management and can lead to reduced breathing rate. If your body is exposed to more opioids than it can handle, this can result in an overdose, wherein a person's breathing falls to a dangerously low level and puts them in a serious, life-threatening condition. Listed below are some ways to tell if someone is having an overdose.

- People can be at a higher risk for an overdose if they:
 - Use opioids from a new or unfamiliar source,
 - Use alone,
 - Use after a long period without use (either because they were in recovery or could not get access to opioids),
 - Use together with other drugs, especially alcohol and/or benzodiazepines,
 - Have chronic health conditions such as heart/lung diseases, HIV, Hepatitis C, among others,
 - Or have experienced an overdose in the past.
- People experiencing an overdose commonly exhibit the following symptoms:
 - Weak or low breathing, if any,
 - A strangled rattling or gurgling sound,
 - Are unresponsive to verbal or physical cues (e.g. a sternum rub)
 - Have discolored skin (blue for those with pale skin, grey for those with darker skin).

Look for these potential signs and symptoms...

Blue or purple fingernails and lips

Unresponsiveness to voice or touch

Pinpoint-sized pupils

Recognizing an Opioid Overdose

When a person overdoses, breathing will slow dangerously and may stop altogether, eventually leading to brain damage or death.

Slow heartbeat or low blood pressure

Slow, irregular, or stopped breathing

Pale, clammy skin

If you suspect an opioid overdose, call 911 and get emergency medical assistance immediately.

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Signs of Opioid Overdose- Skin Tone Changes



Lighter skin turns bluish purple



Darker skin turns grayish or ashen



Everyone's lips & nails turn blue or purplish black

Naloxone

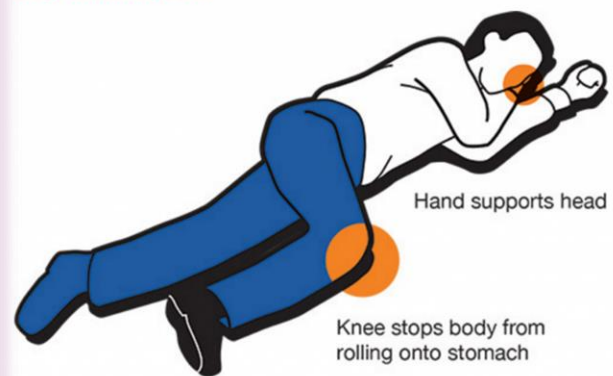
Naloxone, commonly known as Narcan, is an opioid-specific overdose medication that can be administered by injection or through a nasal spray. The nasal spray is commonly available in all 50 states, and can sometimes even be obtained over the counter at a local pharmacy. See the resources below for places where Narcan is available. Naloxone is safe and effective to use. While it can only work to reverse an opioid overdose, if you suspect an overdose, administer Naloxone anyway. It won't do any additional harm, and if their overdose is caused by opioids, you can help save their life.

What to Do if You Spot and Overdose

- Check for signs of overdose. Try and rouse the person verbally (for example: "I'm going to give you Narcan,") or with a sternum/forehead rub (rub your knuckles up and down their chest or forehead if you cannot reach their chest with firm pressure),
- Call 9-1-1 and let them know that someone isn't breathing,
- Give Naloxone,
 - Place the dispenser in their nose; be careful not to press the pump on the bottom until after you put it in their nostril,
 - Press the pump on the bottom to administer a dose.
- Provide rescue breaths (ideally using a bag or valve mask):
 - Check to make sure their mouth is clear,
 - Tilt their head back slightly, lift chin, and pinch their nose closed,
 - Give 1 normal breath every 5 seconds, checking to make sure their chest (not their stomach!) rises with each breath,
 - Use a bag-valve mask if you are trained to use one (this is best practice).
- If their breathing does not resume after 2 - 3 minutes, apply Naloxone again in the other nostril and repeat rescue breaths. Repeat administering Naloxone (alternating nostrils each time) and administering rescue breaths until you 1.) run out of Naloxone, 2.) help arrives, 3.) the person's breathing improves, or 4.) you are unable to continue.
- If their breathing improves, put them in the recovery position (see below).
- Stay with them until help arrives.
- If you must leave for whatever reason, administer naloxone, give rescue breaths if time allows, and put them in the rescue position. Leave the expended naloxone beside the person to emergency responders know what happened.

The Recovery Position

Keep the Airway Clear



Stay with person. If you must leave them alone at any point, or if they are unconscious, put them in this position to keep airway clear and prevent choking.

RESOURCES

Mass.gov's how to reverse an overdose: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/how-to-reverse-an-overdose>

CDC Naloxone fact sheet: <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/naloxone/pdf/Naloxone-Fact-Sheet-508.pdf>

Mass.gov Opioid Risk Factors Factsheet: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/opioid-overdose-risk-factors>

Where to Find Naloxone: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/naloxone-distribution-program-locator>