

# Signs of Opioid Misuse, Opioid Use Disorder, and Overdose

KNOW THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS



## What are the signs of opioid misuse and opioid use disorder?

**Opioid misuse** is the use prescription drugs without a prescription, or in a different way than prescribed. **Opioid use disorder** is a problematic pattern of opioid use that causes significant impairments or distress at work, school, or home.

Opioid use disorder is preferred over other terms like “opioid abuse or dependence” or “opioid addiction.”

## What are the signs of an opioid overdose?

- 1 **Small, constricted** “pinpoint pupils”
- 2 **Falling asleep** or loss of consciousness
- 3 **Slow, shallow** breathing
- 4 **Choking** or gurgling sounds
- 5 **Limp** body
- 6 **Discolored skin** (especially in lips and nails)

→ [www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/patients/Preventing-an-Opioid-Overdose-Tip-Card-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/patients/Preventing-an-Opioid-Overdose-Tip-Card-a.pdf)

## Additional signs of an opioid use disorder include:

- **Unsuccessful efforts** to cut down or control opioid use
- **Social challenges**
- **Failure to fulfill** obligations

→ [FindTreatment.gov](https://www.findtreatment.gov)

→ [Commonly Used Terms | CDC’s Response to the Opioid Overdose Epidemic | CDC](#)



[cdc.gov/RxAwareness](https://cdc.gov/RxAwareness)



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
National Center for Injury  
Prevention and Control

## What to do if you think someone is overdosing?

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



**Call 911**  
immediately



**Administer naloxone,**  
if available



**Try to keep the person awake**  
and breathing



**Lay the person on their side**  
to prevent choking



**Stay with the person**  
until emergency workers arrive

In rural and remote areas where formal emergency services are not available, there are often first responders, such as Village Public Safety Officers or community volunteers, who have been trained to treat overdoses and have access to naloxone, a medication that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Project HOPE, a State of Alaska program, also offers naloxone through various community organizations at no charge. Please visit [dhss.alaska.gov/osmap/Pages/hope.aspx](https://dhss.alaska.gov/osmap/Pages/hope.aspx) to learn more about access to naloxone.

## 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 minutes<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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



### Injectable

Medication (solution) given by injection into a muscle or under the skin

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

## References

1. Harm Reduction TO — Naloxone: Overdose Reversal <https://harmreductionto.ca/naloxone>
2. Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit. (2018). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma18-4742.pdf>