

How and When to Use Naloxone for an Opioid Overdose

Naloxone saves lives because it can quickly restore normal breathing to a person whose breathing has slowed or stopped as a result of overdosing on prescription opioid medications, heroin, or drugs that are adulterated and contaminated with an opioid like fentanyl (e.g., cocaine, methamphetamine).¹



What are the signs of an opioid overdose?

During an overdose, a person's breathing can be dangerously slowed or stopped, causing brain damage or death. It's important to recognize the signs and act fast, even before emergency workers arrive. Signs of an overdose may include:^{2,3}

- Small, constricted "pinpoint pupils"
- Limp body
- Falling asleep or loss of consciousness
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Choking or gurgling sounds



Naloxone (Narcan®) temporarily reverses the effects of overdose from drugs made from opium or opioids, including:¹

- heroin
- morphine
- oxycodone (OxyContin®)
- methadone
- fentanyl
- hydrocodone (Vicodin®)
- codeine
- hydromorphone
- buprenorphine

If you give naloxone to a person who has not taken an opioid medicine, it will not hurt them.¹ To learn about training on how to give naloxone, visit getnaloxonenow.org.

Side effects of naloxone

Naloxone can (but does not always) cause withdrawal symptoms, unpleasant physical reactions, when an individual stops using a substance that they depend on. Withdrawal symptoms may be uncomfortable but are not life-threatening.¹

Withdrawal symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Nausea
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Fast heart rate
- Sweating
- Vomiting
- Shaking

What to do if you think someone has overdosed on opioids

1. Call 911 immediately.
2. Give naloxone as quickly as possible, if available. Do not wait for emergency workers to arrive before giving naloxone.
3. Try to keep the person awake and breathing.
4. Lay the person on their side to prevent choking.
5. Stay with the person until emergency workers arrive.
6. Naloxone is a temporary treatment. More than one dose might be needed under some circumstances, especially if an overdose event involves illicitly manufactured fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances.⁴

Remember, naloxone is a safe medicine. By carrying naloxone, you can save a life.⁵ After naloxone is used or if it is expired, make sure to let your clinician or pharmacist know so you can get more.



For more information and resources on naloxone, visit [cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/hcp/toolkits/naloxone](https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/hcp/toolkits/naloxone), and for drug overdose prevention, visit [cdc.gov/overdose-prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention).

¹<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/naloxone>

²<https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/medications-counseling-related-conditions/opioid-overdose>

³<https://harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/overview/overdose-basics/recognizing-opioid-overdose/>

⁴<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma18-4742.pdf>

⁵<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/opioids-and-addiction/naloxone-advisory/index.html>