

What is an opioid overdose?

Opioids affect the part of the brain which regulates breathing. So when a person uses more of a drug, or a combination of drugs than the body can handle, this can cause the person to stop breathing, leading to death.

What are the risk factors for an overdose?

- Using a greater amount or a stronger potency of a drug or using a new supply.
- Switching how a drug is taken, e.g. crushing, smoking, snorting or injecting the drug vs swallowing.
- Using drugs after a period of not using them (in treatment, hospital, jail).
- Mixing with alcohol or other drugs including prescription drugs such as sedatives, anti-depressants and anti-anxiety (benzodiazepines).
- Using alone.

What are the signs of an overdose?

- Can't wake the person.
- Breathing is very slow, irregular or has stopped.
- Finger nails or lips are blue or purple.
- Body is limp.
- Deep snoring or gurgling sounds.
- Pupils are very small or pinpoint.



What do you do if you think someone has overdosed?

- Shake their shoulders and shout at them.
- If no response, call 911 immediately.
- Give Naloxone, if available, and follow the training you have received (chest compressions/CPR).
- If the person wakes up, turn them on their side to prevent choking (recovery position).
- Stay with them until help arrives.

Naloxone

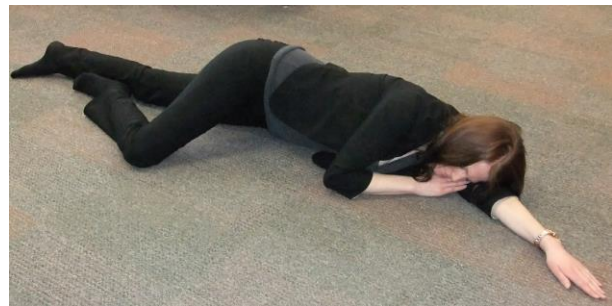
- Temporarily blocks the harmful effects of the opioid and restores breathing (antidote).
- Starts to work in 1-5 minutes and lasts for about 30-90 minutes. This is fairly short compared to the length of action of most opioids, so the overdose can return. This is why it is so important to call 911.
- Only works with opiates, not alcohol, cocaine, LSD etc; but if given, would not cause harm.



Know the Recovery Position

If the person begins breathing on their own, or if you have to leave them alone, put them in the recovery position. This keeps their airway open and prevents choking.

- head should be tilted back slightly to open airway
- hand supports head
- knee stops body from rolling onto stomach



It is important that you refer to the policies/procedures developed by your employer for your workplace to guide your actions.

Take-home Naloxone Kits

Take-home Naloxone kits and training are available free of charge and without a prescription (at the health unit and many local pharmacies) for people at risk of overdose and their family and friends.

Naloxone training may include:

- initiating chest compressions/CPR
- giving initial dose of Naloxone,
- giving the second dose of Naloxone if the person is not awake after 2-3 minutes,
- continuing chest compressions/CPR until the person responds or EMS arrives,
- staying with the person.

**For more information, please contact
Health Connection at 1-877-821-8520 / 705-721-7520 or
smdhu.org/stopoverdoses**