

Naloxone: What You Need to Know

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan[®], is a medication called an “opioid antagonist,” used to counter the effects of an opioid overdose, such as morphine or heroin. Naloxone is easy to administer, making it ideal for treating an overdose in someone who has been prescribed opioid pain medication or who uses heroin and other opioids. In addition to being a prescription medication, Naloxone is now available over the counter in some states.

Using Naloxone

Naloxone is an important tool in helping to prevent fatalities related to opioid overdose and has no potential for abuse. If Naloxone is administered in a timely manner, it can help reduce some of the morbidities, such as medical complications or conditions, associated with non-fatal overdose. Most importantly, Naloxone can help prevent fatal overdoses.

You can inject Naloxone into a muscle, vein or under the skin, or spray it into the nose. Naloxone that is injected comes in a concentration of 0.4mg/1ml, Naloxone in a syringe that takes the nasal atomizer is concentrated at 1mg/1ml and the brand name (Narcan) nasal spray comes in a concentration of 4mg/0.1ml. Once Naloxone is administered, 911 should be called for assistance since the drug will wear off in 30 to 90 minutes.

When to Consider Naloxone

Please consider prescribing Naloxone to your patients who have any of the following risk factors for opioid overdose:

- Recent medical care for opioid poisoning/intoxication/overdose
- Suspected or confirmed history of heroin or nonmedical opioid use
- High-dose opioid prescription (≥ 100 mg/day morphine equivalence)
- Any methadone prescription for opioid naive patient
- Recently released from incarceration and a past user or abuser of opioids, presumably with reduced opioid tolerance and high risk of relapse to opioid use.
- Recent release from mandatory abstinence program or drug detox program
- Enrolled in methadone or buprenorphine detox/maintenance for addiction or pain
- Any opioid prescription and known or suspected:
 - Smoking, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), emphysema, asthma, sleep apnea, or other respiratory system disease
 - Renal or hepatic disease
 - Alcohol use
 - Concurrent benzodiazepine use
 - Concurrent antidepressant prescription
- Remoteness from or difficulty accessing medical care
- Voluntary patient request

Need More Information?

For more information, please visit the following:

- UnitedHealthcare Provider Website: UHCprovider.com > Menu > Resource Library > Drug Lists and Pharmacy > Opioid Programs and Resources
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Website: samhsa.gov > Programs & Campaigns > Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies > Grantees Stories, Tools & Resources > T/TA Tools > Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit
- Harm Reduction Coalition Website: harmreduction.org/

Information courtesy of the Harm Reduction Coalition: Guide to Developing and Managing Overdose Prevention and Take-Home Naloxone Projects.

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