

Understanding Naloxone (Narcan®)

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone (also known as Narcan®) is a prescription medicine that reverses an opioid overdose, which can be caused by prescription analgesics (e.g., Percocet, OxyContin), and heroin. Naloxone will only reverse an opioid overdose, it does not prevent deaths caused by other drugs such as benzodiazepines (e.g. Xanax®, Klonopin® and Valium®), bath salts, cocaine, methamphetamine or alcohol. However, naloxone may also be effective for polysubstance overdoses such as a combined opioid and alcohol overdose. It cannot be used to get high and is not addictive. Naloxone is safe and effective; emergency medical professionals have used it for decades. For more detailed information, visit www.drugs.com/pro/naloxone.html

How does naloxone help?

Naloxone is an antidote to opioid drugs. Opioids can slow or stop a person's breathing, which causes death. An overdose death may happen hours after taking drugs. Naloxone restores the overdose victim's breathing. If a bystander notices that a person's breathing has slowed, stopped, or an overdose is suspected, naloxone can act as a bridge between the call to 911 and when help arrives to keep the person breathing.

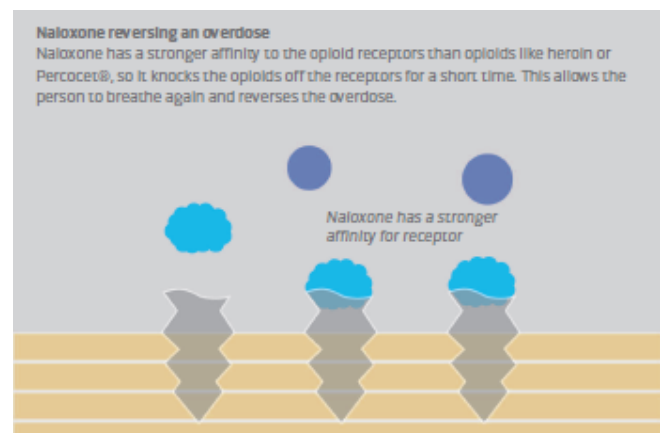
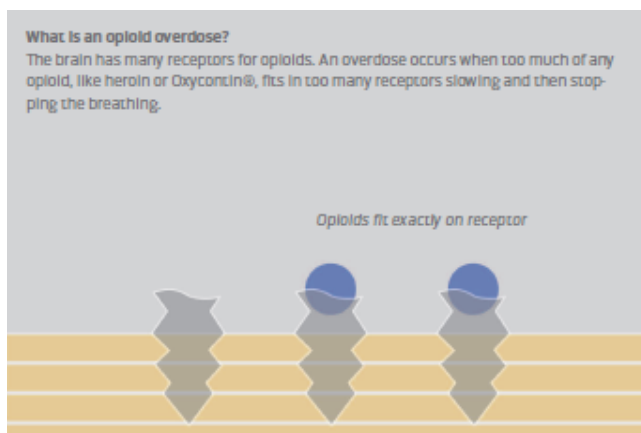
How do you give naloxone?

Into the muscle (intramuscular injection): Naloxone should be injected into the upper arm muscle (the deltoid), the outer thigh, or the buttocks. In an emergency, it is safe to inject through clothing.

Into the nose (intranasal spray): Naloxone for nasal use is given with a foam tip (nebulizer, adapter, or atomizer) that is put on a syringe then placed into the nostril. Intranasal naloxone has not been approved by the FDA (i.e., it is an "off-label" delivery method), but can be legally prescribed by a medical provider or approved pharmacists. First responders often give naloxone intranasally.

How long does naloxone take to work?

Naloxone acts in 2-5 minutes. If the person doesn't wake up in 5 minutes, bystanders should give a second dose. Rescue breathing should be done while you wait for the naloxone to take effect so that the person gets oxygen to their brain. Oxygen is the key to survival for someone experiencing an overdose or overmedication.



What does naloxone cost?

For an individual, a complete intra-nasal or intra-muscular kit costs under \$50, and some of that cost is usually reimbursable by insurance. For medical providers, intra-nasal administration kits cost approximately \$25-\$35, while intra-muscular administration kits cost less than \$10 for a complete kit. In North Carolina, there are programs providing naloxone to those who need it for free or for a small donation.

What is naloxone's shelf life?

Naloxone is required to have an expiration date of at least 12 months later than the date it is prescribed, and typically has a shelf life of up to 18 months.

Can naloxone harm someone?

No. If you suspect an opioid overdose, it is safe to give naloxone. People who are dependent on opioids may wake up with withdrawal symptoms. Acute withdrawal is an extremely unpleasant experience, but the overdose victim is alive and can seek further medical care. Always call 911 as an overdose victim may need other care.

Can naloxone wear off before the drugs that cause the overdose?

Yes. Naloxone typically wears off in 30-90 minutes and the person can stop breathing again unless more naloxone is available. For this reason, it is safest to call 911 and have the person taken for medical care.

Is naloxone just a "safety net" that allows people to use even more?

Research studies have investigated this common concern and found that making naloxone available does NOT encourage people to use opioids more. The goal of distributing naloxone and educating people about how to prevent, recognize and intervene in overdoses is to prevent deaths. Other goals, such as decreasing drug use, can only be accomplished if the user is alive.

Is the overdose scene in the movie *Pulp Fiction* realistic?

No. *Pulp Fiction* is a movie! A person overdosing from heroin or pain medication may be very quiet or irregularly snoring or gasping. Gradually the breathing slows or stops as their skin turns dusky blue or gray.

In real life, bystanders who witness an overdose SHOULD NOT INJECT ANYTHING INTO THE HEART. Instead, they should squirt naloxone into the nose, or inject naloxone into the upper arm, thigh, or buttocks.



Nasal naloxone overdose prevention kit

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Sources:

<http://www.stopoverdose.org>

<http://harmreduction.org>

<http://prescribetoprevent.org>