

Naloxone and Overdose FAQs

Opioids and Overdose

What is an opioid?

Opioids are a group of drugs originally developed to help people recover from injuries and surgery and to manage chronic or acute pain. Opioid drugs include legal prescription pain medicine and illegal drugs. Examples of opioids include morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, heroin and fentanyl. Opioids cause the majority of overdose deaths.

What is an overdose?

An overdose happens when a person takes a toxic amount of a substance. Overdoses are a medical emergency and are life threatening. Overdoses can be caused by almost any drug, but some (such as opioids) are more likely to cause an overdose. An opioid overdose happens when a person's breathing slows down too much and they stop breathing. Without intervention, like naloxone, this can be fatal.

How are opioids and other drugs contributing to the overdose crisis?

Some opioids, like fentanyl, are so powerful they can cause an overdose in a very small amount. Illegal fentanyl is increasingly being combined with other drugs (with or without a person's knowledge) like cocaine, xylazine, methamphetamine and benzodiazepines. Combining substances can lead to unpredictable effects and a higher likelihood of overdose.

What are the signs of an opioid overdose?

Opioids slow a person's breathing. An opioid overdose happens when a person's breathing slows down so much that it stops. Signs of an opioid overdose commonly include unresponsiveness, slow or shallow breathing, pinpoint pupils, blue/grey lips and skin, cold or clammy skin and blue nail beds.

How does overdose impact the workplace?

Nearly 1 in 10 workers who died at work died from an overdose in 2022. Overdose deaths at work have increased over 600% since 2011. Also, any workplace that has public interaction may have increased risk of overdose on-the-job from members of the general public. In addition to the human impact, employers may face increased healthcare costs, productivity costs and decreased employee morale.

What industries are most impacted by overdose?

This crisis reaches employees in [all industries and occupations](#). On average, construction, manufacturing, and the trade, transportation and utilities industries



experience the highest number of fatal overdoses on the job. In construction, workplace overdose deaths have increased 1271% since 2011.

How can workplace injury lead to opioid use?

Workers who experience injuries on the job might be prescribed opioids for pain. Prolonged recovery periods and the prescription of opioids for pain management can lead to dependency. Additionally, psychological stress, job-related concerns and a lack of alternative pain management strategies may further contribute to legal or illegal opioid use.

Naloxone

What is naloxone?

Naloxone is an opioid overdose reversal medication. Naloxone temporarily stops the impact opioids have on the brain, returning a person to normal breathing. Two brands of naloxone are approved as an over-the-counter medication by the FDA, Narcan and RiVive, making this life-saving medication more easily available.

Is naloxone safe?

Yes, naloxone is safe. It is [not habit forming](#) and will not harm someone who is not experiencing an opioid overdose if administered.

Why should my workplace have naloxone?

Employers have a responsibility to provide a safe working environment. Naloxone should be included in every workplace just as organizations prioritize other emergency response measures that can save lives, such as AEDs. With the opioid epidemic being a significant concern, having naloxone on hand demonstrates a commitment to employee wellbeing, reduces stigma and contributes to the community effort to address the crisis.

What should you do if you think someone is experiencing an overdose?

Naloxone should be given to any person you suspect is having an overdose. In workplace and community settings, naloxone is commonly available as a nasal spray, although there are other forms of delivery. In a possible opioid overdose emergency, call 9-1-1 immediately and request naloxone and AED if available. For free naloxone training, visit [this link](#).

How should we store naloxone?

Check the product package for specific storage considerations. With proper storage, naloxone generally expires after four years. Naloxone should be kept at room temperature, avoiding temperature extremes. Employers should keep naloxone in accessible locations such as first aid kits, AED cabinets or other locations depending on the worksite. Educate all workers, including contractors, at a facility or site on where they can find naloxone.

How many doses of naloxone do we need?

It is recommended to keep *at least* two doses of naloxone in each location where it is stored. More than two doses may be needed to revive a person who has overdosed, especially because the amount of opioids used may vary. In any case of suspected opioid overdose, seeking emergency medical assistance is crucial, even if naloxone has been administered successfully. Remember, some naloxone is always better than none.

How quickly do I need to administer naloxone if I think someone is having an overdose?

An overdose is a life-threatening emergency. As soon as you suspect an overdose, give naloxone as quickly as possible. Naloxone can restore breathing in in as little as two to three minutes. Another dose may be required.

Can administering naloxone harm someone if they are not experiencing an opioid overdose?

No. Naloxone is [a safe medicine](#). Naloxone only works if opioids are present in the body. Naloxone does not impact any other medications a person is taking or any other emergency they might be having. Naloxone is not addictive and [cannot be misused](#). Even if you are not sure a person is having an overdose caused by opioids, give naloxone and follow your organization's emergency response procedures.

Are there side effects of naloxone?

The goal of naloxone is to restore breathing in a person experiencing an opioid overdose. There are [virtually no side effects](#) from naloxone if a person is not experiencing an opioid overdose. A person who is revived may experience drug withdrawal, like vomiting or sweating. Also, a person recovering from an opioid overdose may be confused or disoriented as they start breathing and regain consciousness. Talk quietly to them and assure them they are safe.

Does making naloxone available perpetuate substance use?

Naloxone gives people a chance at life and recovery. [Research](#) has shown that naloxone does not lead to more drug use or riskier drug use. In fact, some [studies](#) have shown that naloxone results in a decreased use of opioids.

Workplace Safety and Programming

How can I get naloxone for my workplace?

There are several options for getting naloxone. Some state and local public health departments have naloxone available for free. You can purchase NARCAN in bulk through the NSC website, [here](#). Your organization can also purchase naloxone over the counter from pharmacies without a prescription. Some recovery or harm reduction organizations may be able to provide naloxone as well.

What PPE or other resources should be available in our overdose kits?

The most important thing to have available is naloxone and instructions for use. Additionally, an overdose kit could include PPE like gloves and CPR masks. Your organization may also choose to provide other information such as local recovery or public health resources. Potential places to store an overdose kit include in a first aid kit or near the AED.

Will I be exposed to fentanyl or other drugs if I administer naloxone?

It is highly unlikely that you would be exposed to fentanyl when giving someone naloxone. If you have PPE available, use it, as you would in any emergency response scenario. Incidental skin exposure to fentanyl is both unlikely to happen and [unlikely to harm you](#). If you believe you may have come in contact with fentanyl, wash your hands with soap and water as soon as you can—especially before eating or touching your mouth or nose.

Is overdose OSHA recordable?

With some forms of naloxone recently becoming available without a prescription, the administration of naloxone in the workplace may not be a recordable injury or illness and therefore would not be recorded based solely on the administration of naloxone alone. Administration of naloxone may become recordable when treatment beyond first aid is provided and if it is administered in conjunction with other general recording criteria contained in 1904.7. For more information, reference this [fact sheet](#).

What are the essential elements of an opioid overdose response program in my workplace?

The most important elements of an opioid overdose response program include naloxone access, organizational policies and employee training. Other elements can include employee support resources and anti-stigma education, amongst others. Your organization can integrate this program into existing emergency response plans. When setting up a new program, work with legal professionals to understand state and local laws and liability requirements. Learn more [here](#).

Who should be trained on responding to an overdose?

The best answer is—everyone. Naloxone is relatively easy to use and most people can be trained to give naloxone. Organizations may choose to train specific employee groups, such as first responders. NSC offers a comprehensive overdose response and naloxone training in [CPR and first aid courses](#). The [NSC Naloxone for Suspected Opioid Overdose eLearning](#) is available for free.

How is naloxone a component of a recovery supportive workplace?

Recovery supportive workplaces focus on both preventing substance misuse and overdose and helping employees in their recovery. Naloxone contributes to a recovery supportive workplace by providing a rapid response to opioid overdoses, ensuring employee safety and wellbeing. Its presence supports broader initiatives fostering a supportive environment for those in recovery from substance use disorders. Integrating



naloxone into emergency preparedness programs helps create a workplace culture that addresses opioid-related risks and encourages seeking help without stigma.

Can an employer be liable for stocking or using naloxone in the workplace?

There does not appear to be any increased liability for carrying naloxone or using it on a person suspected of experiencing an opioid overdose, regardless of where it occurs. It is important to understand local and state laws, such as Good Samaritan Overdose Prevention Laws and Naloxone Access Laws. Visit [this resource](#) for specific employer considerations. Remember to always work with legal professionals on new policies and procedures.