

Naloxone in Opiate Overdose



Naloxone Mechanism of Action

- Highly specific, high-affinity opioid antagonist used to reverse the effects of opioids
- Not a controlled substance
- Lasts 30-90 minutes
- Can be administered by laypeople
- Virtually no side effects or effects in the absence of opioids
- Should still be given if overdose is due to a combination of opioids and other drugs

Prescribers Should Provide Naloxone to the Following Patients

- Patients who have previously experienced opioid intoxication, overdose, opioid use disorder, or anyone with discharge to the community
- Patients with a recent period of opioid abstinence and reinitiation of opioid
- Patients on long-term opioid therapy, on high-dose opioids (>50 morphine milligram equivalents/day), or those with a recent increase in dosage
- Patients with a history of nonmedical use of opioids or other substance use disorder (including, but not limited to, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines)
- Patients on long-acting opioids (e.g., methadone, fentanyl patch) or on regimens of multiple opioids
- Patients on concurrent benzodiazepine or other CNS depressants
- Patients requesting access to naloxone
- Family members or friends of any patient meeting the above criteria or anyone at risk of witnessing an overdose (as third-party prescribing or furnishing)

Key Prescriber Actions with Naloxone

- Offer a prescription or the naloxone kit- the patient can decline the prescription, but the offer should be documented
- Educate the patient and caregivers
 - On recognizing the signs of an overdose and the need to give the medication as quickly as possible
 - How to properly administer the specific naloxone device
 - Emphasize that naloxone's effects are temporary and a second dose may need to be given.
 - The vital importance of calling 911 immediately after administration
 - Advise the patient to tell families and friends where the naloxone is stored and to keep it accessible
- Document the discussion, the offer to prescribe or provide naloxone, patient education, and the reason if the patient declines

Key Steps After Administering Naloxone

- Monitor the person constantly- the effects of naloxone are temporary, while the effects of some opioids may last longer. The person could go back into an overdose and might need another dose
- Provide another dose if necessary- If the person does not respond within 2 to 3 minutes, or if they relapse into an overdose before emergency help arrives, administer a second dose in the other nostril (if using a nasal spray)
- Continue rescue breathing/CPR- if the person is not breathing adequately or has no pulse, continue rescue breathing or perform CPR until emergency personnel arrive
- Place in the recovery position- if the person starts breathing on their own but is not fully awake, roll them onto their side to prevent choking (if they vomit)
- Comfort and reassure the person- when they wake up, they may be confused, disoriented, or experiencing acute withdrawal symptoms (agitation, nausea, vomiting, body aches, etc.). Stay with them, keep them calm, and explain what happened
- Prevent further drug use- caution the person against more opioids immediately, as they are at high risk of another overdose once the naloxone wears off
- Ensure medical evaluation- it is crucial that the person receives professional medical attention as soon as possible for observation and potential linkage to care for opioid use disorder, even if they seem to have recovered completely

Additional Resources

- Naloxone Products:
<https://prescribetoprevent.org/wp2015/wp-content/uploads/May-June-2025.pdf>
- Prescription and Dispensing Instructions for Injectable Naloxone with tear-off patient instructions:
https://www.prescribetoprevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/one-pager_22.pdf
- Prescription and Dispensing Instructions for Nasal Naloxone with tear-off patient instructions:
<https://www.prescribetoprevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/naloxone-one-pager-in-nov-2012.pdf>
- Videos for Instruction on Naloxone Administration, Overdose Education, Naloxone Conversations:
<https://prescribetoprevent.org/patient-education/videos/>