

Preventing Overdose in People Who Inject Substances

Our hospital staff cares about you and your unborn or new baby and wants to protect your health. Heroin, fentanyl and other injectable substances are high risk for overdose and difficult to quit on your own. People who use these substances by injection are at high risk of overdose, skin infections, and blood infections such as hepatitis, HIV, and endocarditis. Injection substance use can also interfere with your ability to work, go to school, have healthy relationships, and care for yourself and others.



While we encourage you to seek help for your substance use as soon as possible, we understand that people must enter recovery at their own pace. We want you and your baby to be as healthy and safe as possible, even if you continue injection substance use. **Pregnant and postpartum people are prioritized when accessing treatment!**

For videos on how to use naloxone, scan this QR code or visit naloxoneproject.com

Preventing an Overdose

1) Avoid using substances alone.

It is less risky to use substances, especially opioids, when someone else is there to help in case of an accidental overdose. Colorado's Good Samaritan Law protects individuals who call 911 to report an overdose. Neither the patient nor caller can be criminally charged or arrested for possessing small amounts of drugs.

2) Always carry naloxone.

Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, is the antidote for an opioid overdose. This medication temporarily reverses the effects of opioids on the brain. **Giving naloxone to a pregnant or postpartum woman who has overdosed can be lifesaving to both mom and baby.** The antidote will often restore a person's ability to breathe and awaken them from an unconscious, coma-like state. Naloxone is a safe, non-addictive medication that has been used for decades to reverse overdose and is **safe for both mom and baby.**

Anyone who is at risk of an overdose, or knows someone who is, should carry naloxone—and this includes those receiving prescription opioids for chronic pain. If given to a patient with opioid dependence, naloxone can cause opioid withdrawal. Although these effects can be unpleasant and may cause temporary discomfort, the treatment is safe and better than not treating a potential opioid overdose.

Avoid storing your naloxone in a very hot or cold location, and let your family and friends know where the medication is kept. Replace your naloxone every two years. If the only naloxone available is past its expiration date, you should still use it and call 911.

MOMs +

(Maternal Overdose Matters)

Naloxone is available without a prescription at more than 500 Colorado pharmacies. Many different formulations of the medication are now available, but Narcan nasal spray may be easiest to use. You can find participating pharmacies at stoptheclockcolorado.org or ERnaloxone.org. Medicaid, Medicare, and most private insurers cover the full cost of naloxone or charge only a small copay. If you care about someone who is at risk of overdose, remind them that it is easy to get naloxone in Colorado.

3) Try tester shots. Use fentanyl test strips.

When trying a new product or using substances after any period of abstinence, start with a small test dose (tester shot) to gauge its potency. Almost every street product now contains fentanyl, and potency is steadily increasing and unpredictable. Use a fentanyl test strip if you are unsure.

4) Know the risks.

The following risk factors increase the risk of an overdose when using substances:

- ▶ Injecting opioids, such as heroin and fentanyl—especially a new batch, of unknown potency
- ▶ Mixing opioids with benzodiazepines, alcohol, methamphetamines, cocaine, or other illicit products or prescription medications
- ▶ Using after a period of abstinence from opioids (for example, after a period of hospitalization, incarceration, detox, etc)
- ▶ Serious medical illnesses such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or other lung disorder; kidney, liver, or heart disease; HIV/AIDS

What are the signs of an overdose?

People with opioid poisoning may look as if they're sleeping. **REMEMBER: IT IS NEVER SAFE TO LET A PERSON WHO MIGHT BE OVERDOSING "SLEEP IT OFF."**



What should I do if I think someone is overdosing?

1) If you have naloxone, give it!

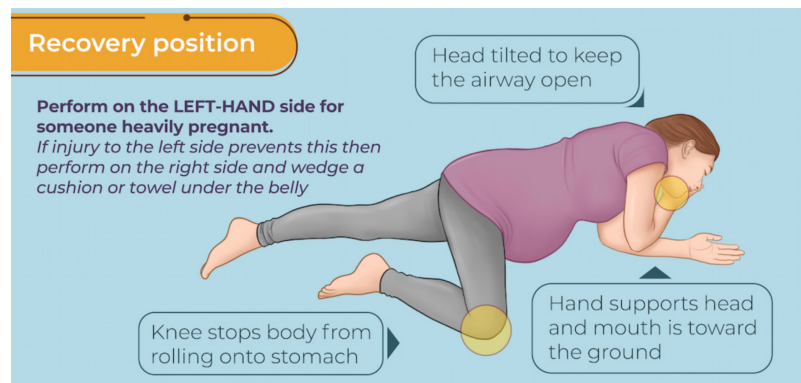
Try to wake the person by shouting their name and shaking them. If someone is with you, they can call 911 while you prepare to administer naloxone. **Naloxone is only effective for reversing opioid overdoses.** However, if you are unsure of the substance(s) or illness involved, it's still wise to give naloxone. Many overdoses involve multiple drugs. Naloxone will not cause any harm in the case of a nonopioid overdose or other medical problem. If the first dose of naloxone doesn't bring back breathing and alertness within a few minutes, give a second dose. For videos on how to give naloxone, visit the [Colorado Naloxone Project](http://ColoradoNaloxoneProject.org) website or ERnaloxone.org.

2) Call 911.

Call 911, even if the patient begins to wake up, and follow the operator's instructions. **You may be instructed to perform CPR or rescue breathing** if the person remains unconscious.

3) Stay with the patient.

The person should be placed in the recovery position once they have begun breathing on their own. Even after waking up, some patients may not realize that they have overdosed.



Calmly explain what happened and stay with the patient until emergency medical help arrives. When revived, some people may be agitated and suffering from withdrawal symptoms. It is important to know that naloxone wears off within 30 to 90 minutes, and victims can slip back into overdose. **Always seek help in the emergency department, even if the patient appears to be feeling better.**

4) After an overdose

The time following an overdose may present an opportunity to consider treatment. Your emergency department, primary care, prenatal care, or pediatric medical team can connect you with people who can help. Visit drugfree.org for more information.

How do I administer naloxone nasal spray?



QUICK START GUIDE Opioid Overdose Response Instructions

Use NARCAN® (naloxone hydrochloride) Nasal Spray for known or suspected opioid overdose in adults and children.

Important: For use in the nose only.

Do not remove or test the NARCAN Nasal Spray until ready to use.

1 Identify Opioid Overdose and Check for Response

Ask person if he or she is okay and shout name.

Shake shoulders and firmly rub the middle of their chest.

Check for signs of an opioid overdose:

- Will not wake up or respond to your voice or touch
- Breathing is very slow, irregular, or has stopped
- Center part of their eye is very small, sometimes called "pinpoint pupils"

Lay the person on their back to receive a dose of NARCAN Nasal Spray.



2 Give NARCAN Nasal Spray

REMOVE NARCAN Nasal Spray from the box. Peel back the tab with the circle to open the NARCAN Nasal Spray.

Hold the NARCAN Nasal Spray with your thumb on the bottom of the red plunger and your first and middle fingers on either side of the nozzle.

Gently insert the tip of the nozzle into either nostril.

- Tilt the person's head back and provide support under the neck with your hand. Gently insert the tip of the nozzle into **one nostril**, until your fingers on either side of the nozzle are against the bottom of the person's nose.

Press the red plunger firmly to give the dose of NARCAN Nasal Spray.

- Remove the NARCAN Nasal Spray from the nostril after giving the dose.



3 Call for emergency medical help, Evaluate, and Support

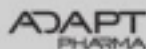
Get emergency medical help right away.

Move the person on their side (recovery position) after giving NARCAN Nasal Spray.

Watch the person closely.

If the person does not respond by waking up, to voice or touch, or breathing normally another dose may be given. NARCAN Nasal Spray may be dosed every 2 to 3 minutes, if available.

Repeat Step 2 using a new NARCAN Nasal Spray to give another dose in the other nostril. If additional NARCAN Nasal Sprays are available, repeat step 2 every 2 to 3 minutes until the person responds or emergency medical help is received.



For more information about NARCAN Nasal Spray, go to www.narcan.com, or call 1-844-6NARCAN (1-844-623-7226). You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

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For More Information About Naloxone and Opioid Overdose

If you would like more information about naloxone and opioid safety, please visit the [Colorado Naloxone Project](#) website or [ERnaloxone.org](#). In addition, [OpiRescue](#) is a free smartphone application that can direct you to nearby pharmacies that stock naloxone; it can also guide you through a naloxone rescue in the event of an overdose.

For Help Finding Treatment

If you or someone you care about would like help for opioid use disorder, we encourage you to call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) national helpline: **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**. This free, confidential service provides 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year support for individuals and families struggling with substance use disorder. **Pregnant and postpartum women are prioritized when accessing [treatment](#)!**

Avoiding Hepatitis and HIV

Don't share equipment. The risk of transmitting HIV and hepatitis is highest when multiple people share paraphernalia within a short period of time. However, HIV can survive for days to weeks inside hollow-bore needles and other equipment. Hepatitis B and C can survive between one and three weeks on equipment and up to 62 days in injection water. Hepatitis can be spread by every piece of infected equipment, including needles, syringes, cookers, injection water, and cotton filters.

Avoiding Skin and Soft-Tissue Infections

Practice good hygiene. Any time you break your skin, you are at risk of infection. Always wash your hands, and clean your injection sites with soap and water. Use an alcohol pad to sterilize the skin immediately prior to injecting. Most pharmacies sell 100 alcohol pads for less than \$2, and syringe access programs often provide them free of charge.

Use sterile water to prepare the product. Many infections stem from unsafe water supplies. It is important to avoid using river water, toilet water, or saliva to dissolve any product into an injectable form. Bottled water is much safer than standing water, but it is NOT sterile. The safest water comes from single-use containers, which can be obtained from most syringe access programs. If a single-use container is unavailable, the water should be sterilized by heating it at a rolling boil for 10 minutes before letting it cool down.

Use sterile equipment. Avoid reusing equipment; reused supplies are often colonized with bacteria. If you must reuse your equipment, soak it in bleach for two minutes, completely flush all components with bleach, and rinse the parts with clean, cold water. Repeat multiple times.

Don't lick needles prior to use. Never lick your needle before putting it into your skin! This greatly increases the risk of infection. In addition, never use water from a used drinking bottle; the water in the bottle will be contaminated with mouth bacteria, which can be very dangerous. Mouth bacteria can cause abscesses and have been associated with a flesh-eating infection known as necrotizing fasciitis.

To Avoid Damaging Your Veins

- Use the smallest needle possible.
- Avoid repeatedly using the same injection site; rotate between multiple locations.
- Do not use veins in the neck, groin, or foot when injecting drugs, as these areas pose a greater risk of infection. You should also avoid injecting in the wrist, where arteries and nerves can be accidentally hit. Staying well hydrated by drinking plenty of water can make it easier to find veins.
- Never use lime juice or lemon juice to dissolve a product. These liquids can cause infections and are very damaging to veins. A citric acid solution can be used if the product is very hard to dissolve.

Local syringe access programs can help provide clean supplies, additional support, and medical referrals:
