

Take Home Naloxone: Backgrounder

Naloxone can prevent opioid-related harms, disability and death

Unintentional deaths from opioid overdose are preventable with overdose and naloxone education. Naloxone or Narcan® has been used in emergency settings for over 40 years in Canada and is on the World Health Organization List of Essential Medicines. Naloxone is a drug that can help restore breathing within about 2 to 5 minutes when it has been dangerously slowed or stopped due to opioid use. Naloxone is not a controlled substance, cannot be abused, and there are few dangers or negative consequences associated with using this drug.

Naloxone can be given by injection or nasal spray. Intramuscular injection is an effective way to use this drug as it can be given through clothing into the muscle of the upper arm or upper leg. While other forms of naloxone exist (such as nasal spray), the Ministry of Health funded Take Home naloxone program utilizes the intramuscular injection form.

Plan ahead - be trained in how to use naloxone. If you come across an opioid overdose situation call 911 and administer naloxone.

Take Home Naloxone programs provide education regarding prevention, recognition and response to opioid overdoses to the public, as well as provide a THN kit to Saskatchewan residents at risk of an opioid overdose and/or witnessing an opioid overdose, once they have received the standard education and training arranged by the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Naloxone is not intended to replace emergency care.

About 85% of overdoses happen when other people are around, so having naloxone available can help save a life and reduce harms related to the overdose while waiting for paramedics to arrive. Naloxone and overdose education go hand-in-hand; together they can greatly reduce the negative and life threatening effects that can result from opioid overdose.

Considerations

Some individuals may experience a hypersensitivity to naloxone. Naloxone may cause opioid withdrawal in those with opioid dependence. Naloxone should also be used with caution in people who have a history of seizures and cardiovascular disease. However, the harms associated with lack of oxygen during an opioid overdose are likely far more serious and could be permanent or fatal. Naloxone is intended to help prevent the damaging effects of an opioid overdose.

Aside from administering naloxone, it is also important to stay with that person while awaiting medical personnel to arrive. The effect of naloxone begins to wear off after 30 minutes. Some longer acting opioids (such as methadone) may last longer in the body than naloxone, so an overdose could return. A second dose of naloxone may be needed.

To make it less likely that an overdose will return, it is important to make sure that the individual knows not to take more drugs for several hours. In addition, you may need to tell them what happened, as they may be confused. Finally, it is important to tell paramedics and/or other medical professionals everything you know about the situation so that they can provide the best treatment.

Calling 911 is important when dealing with an opioid overdose.

Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act

According to The Government of Canada, *The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* can protect an individual who is experiencing, or is present when someone else is experiencing, a drug overdose from charges for possession of a controlled substance, as well as breach of conditions regarding simple possession. The act does not provide legal protection against more serious offences such as outstanding warrants, production and trafficking of controlled substances, and all other crimes not outlined within the act. More information is available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-abuse/prescription-drug-abuse/opioids/about-good-samaritan-drug-overdose-act.html>.

Conclusion

Overdose and naloxone education programs can help save lives. Overdose is one of the harms associated with substance misuse. By learning about opioid overdose and what to do, disability and death can be prevented.

Where can I find more information?

Call Saskatchewan's HealthLine by dialing 811 for general information regarding fentanyl and other alcohol/drug use, including overdose symptoms. HealthLine can refer callers to the appropriate medical, health and/or alcohol/drug related resources available within the community.

Visit www.saskatchewan.ca/opioids for up-to-date information and resources.

If you or your client requires more information, please contact the Saskatchewan Health Authority Addictions/Mental Health Services office or doctor in your community. To locate Addictions/Mental Health Services near you:

- visit www.saskatchewan.ca/addictions
- visit HealthLine Online at healthlineonline.ca; or
- contact HealthLine at 811 and ask to speak to an addictions or mental health counsellor.



NOTE: This material is for information only and should not replace information from a doctor, addictions or mental health counsellor, or other health care provider.

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