

Responding to an overdose during the COVID-19 pandemic

When someone experiences an opioid overdose, there is a very high risk of brain injury or death within a few minutes. It is important to respond quickly to help them breathe again.

What is the risk to the rescuer?

Responding to an overdose requires close contact between the rescuer and the person who is overdosing. There is a risk of infection, especially if rescue breaths are given without using protective equipment. All Take Home Naloxone Kits come with a rescue-breathing mask and gloves to protect rescuers. Rescue breathing masks have one-way valves that protect rescuers from respiratory secretions; however, there is no evidence on how well they protect you from the virus that causes COVID-19.

If you choose to give rescue breaths, there may be a risk of coming into contact with COVID-19 if you or the person who is overdosing:

- live in a region with a high number of COVID-19 cases;
- have been sick with a fever and cough; or

- have not previously been in close contact with each other (i.e. you do not live together and you have been social distancing from each other).

General rules:

- Limit the number of people in the room.
- Avoid physical contact with any person other than the person who is overdosing, and put gloves on before touching the person who is overdosing.
- If the gloves in your kit are not available for some reason, you can still help the person - but make sure you wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer (with at least 60 per cent) alcohol afterwards.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth until you remove your gloves, and wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after responding.

In the SAVE ME steps below, see the basic precautions in green that will keep the risk of infection low:

S	Stimulate. Try to wake the person and tell them to breathe. Put on gloves before you touch the person. Gently move the person onto their back. IF YOU CANNOT WAKE THEM, CALL 911.
A	Airway. Visually check if they are breathing: look for chest movement (no need to put your face near the other person's mouth and nose). Make sure nothing is in their mouth that keeps them from breathing (i.e. gum, food, pills, rig cap, etc.)
V	Ventilate. If you choose to give rescue breaths: tilt their head back, place the rescue-breathing mask over their mouth , plug their nose and give two breaths. Continue to breathe for the person – one breath every five seconds. Do not administer direct mouth-to-mouth rescue breaths.
E	Evaluate. Are they any better? If not, prepare naloxone.
M	Muscular Injection. Inject 1 cc of naloxone into a muscle at a 90° angle (preferably into the outer thigh or a meaty part of the shoulder). You can inject through clothing.
E	Evaluate and Support. If the person is still not breathing on their own and you choose to give rescue breaths, keep breathing for them using the rescue-breathing mask. Do not administer direct mouth-to-mouth rescue breaths. If the naloxone has no effect within five minutes, give another dose of naloxone. If they wake up, warn them that naloxone will wear off.

- If you are trained in CPR, gently place fabric (like a towel or piece of clothing) over the person’s nose and mouth when giving chest compressions.
- If you are using intranasal naloxone, the steps are the same, but avoid putting your face near the face of the person who is overdosing.
- If you need to leave the person at any moment or they start breathing again, place them in the recovery position. Monitor them from behind their back.



After responding:

- Safely dispose of needles in a sharps container or plastic pop bottle with a lid and dispose of the rescue-breathing mask in the garbage.
- Clean and disinfect the area with an approved disinfectant. A list of disinfectants approved by Health Canada can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- After disposing of used rescue materials and cleaning the area, carefully remove your gloves:
 1. Grab the outside edge of one glove near the wrist;
 2. Peel the glove away from your hand, turning it inside out, and hold on to it with your other gloved hand;
 3. Slide an ungloved finger under the wrist of the remaining glove without touching the outside of the glove;
 4. Peel the remaining glove off from the inside, creating an inside-out “bag” with both gloves;
 5. Put the used gloves carefully into the garbage.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds. If unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 per cent alcohol.