

Naloxone Quick Facts

What is naloxone?

Naloxone is a prescription medicine that temporarily stops the effect of opioids. This helps a person start breathing again and wake up from an opioid overdose. Naloxone (the generic name) is also sold under the brand names *Narcan*[®] and *Evzio*[®].

Naloxone:

- only works on opioids. It has no effect on someone who has not taken opioids.
- cannot be used to get high and is not addictive.
- has a long safety history. Adverse side effects are rare.
- can be easily and safely administered by laypersons.

In WA State, anyone who might have or witness an opioid overdose can legally possess and administer naloxone.

How naloxone works

Naloxone attaches to the same brain receptors as opioids, but more strongly. Naloxone kicks off the opioids and “takes over” the receptors. This restores breathing and consciousness in about 2-5 minutes. However, when the naloxone wears off in about 30-90 minutes, any opioids still in the brain can return to the receptors. The person may stop breathing again.

Naloxone will not reverse the effects of other drugs like cocaine, methamphetamine, alcohol, or benzodiazepines (e.g. Xanax[®], Klonopin[®] and Valium[®]). But naloxone can still block the effect of opioids (and reverse the overdose) even if the person has also taken one or more of these other drugs.

When someone wakes up after naloxone, they may feel some symptoms of opioid withdrawal like pain, sweating, nausea, or vomiting. They may also feel confused, anxious or slightly agitated, but rarely combative or violent.

Naloxone is very safe and easy to use. Naloxone can be sprayed into the nose or injected into a thick muscle like the thigh or upper arm.



All of the naloxone products available are similarly effective against opioid overdose. A health care provider or pharmacist can help you select which product is best for you.

The 2 injectable and 2 intranasal products currently available.

Support for take-home naloxone

A number of governmental and professional organizations have endorsed policies to expand opioid overdose education and availability of take-home naloxone:

- World Health Organization [Community Management of Opioid Overdose](#), 2014
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Expanding Naloxone Could Reduce Drug Overdose Deaths](#), 2015

- American Medical Association [Increasing Access to Naloxone](#), 2016
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [Opioid Overdose Toolkit](#), 2013
- American Society of Addiction Medicine [Public Policy Statement on the Use of Naloxone](#), 2010
- American Pharmacists Association [Pharmacists and Naloxone: a Life or Death Difference](#), 2015
- Office of National Drug Control Policy [Preventing, Treating and Surviving Opioid Overdose](#), 2013
- National Commission on Correctional Health Care [Naloxone in Correctional Facilities for the Prevention of Opioid Overdose Deaths](#), 2015

Research on overdose education and naloxone

There is a growing body of research evidence that shows overdose education and naloxone distribution:

Are feasible:

- Piper et al. *Subst Use Misuse* 2008: 43: 858-70
- Doe-Simkins et al. *Am J Public Health* 2009: 99: 788-791
- Enteen et al. *J Urban Health* 2010: 87: 931-41
- Bennet et al. *J Urban Health* 2011: 88: 1020-30
- Walley et al. *JSAT* 2013: 44: 241-7 (Methadone and detox programs)

Are cost effective:

- Coffin et al. *Ann Int Med* 2013

Improve knowledge and skills to prevent overdose deaths:

- Green et al. *Addiction* 2008: 103: 979-89
- Tobin et al. *Int J Drug Policy* 2009: 20: 131-6
- Wagner et al. *Int J Drug Policy* 2010: 21: 186-93

Reduce overdoses in communities:

- Maxwell et al. *J Addict Dis* 2006: 25: 89-96
- Evans et al. *Am J Epidemiol* 2012: 174: 302-8
- Walley et al. *BMJ* 2013: 346: f174

Do not increase drug use:

- Seal et al. *J Urban Health* 2005: 82: 303-11
- Doe-Simkins et al. *BMC Public Health* 2014: 14: 297

SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS:

- A Systematic Review of Community Opioid Overdose Prevention and Naloxone Distribution Programs. Clark et al. *Journal of Addiction Medicine*, 2014.
- Preventing fatal overdoses: a systematic review of the effectiveness of take-home naloxone. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, EMCDDA Papers, 2015.
- A Review of Opioid Overdose Prevention and Naloxone Prescribing: Implications for Translating Community Programming Into Clinical Practice. Mueller et al. *Substance Abuse*, 2015.
- Exploring the Life-Saving Potential of Naloxone: A Systematic Review and Descriptive Meta-Analysis of Take Home Naloxone Programmes for Opioid Users. McAuley et al. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 2015.
- Effectiveness of bystander naloxone administration and overdose education programs: a meta-analysis. Giglio et al. *Injury Epidemiology*, 2015.