

What Is Naloxone?



Opioid overdoses

Opioids are a class of drugs used to treat pain. Examples of opioids include hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, morphine, and methadone. Heroin, an illicit drug, is also an opioid. Misuse of these drugs can lead to addiction and other consequences. Overdosing, or taking too much of an opioid can suppress breathing, leading to death if not treated immediately. Over the past two decades, the number of opioid overdose deaths in the United States has tripled. In 2014, there were 887 deaths from opioid overdoses in the State of Maryland.

What is naloxone?

Naloxone is a lifesaving prescription medication that is used to counter or reverse an opioid overdose. It is prescribed under the brand name Narcan®. It does not have an effect on overdoses of other drugs. Emergency rooms, EMTs, and doctors have been using naloxone to treat opioid overdoses since the 1990s. In 2013, it became legal for individuals in Maryland to carry naloxone. Carrying naloxone is recommended not just for opioid users, but also for individuals who are likely to witness an overdose. This includes friends and family members of opioid users.

How is it administered?

Naloxone can be administered in two ways: into the muscle (intramuscular, or IM, administration) or into the nose (intranasal administration). For IM administration, a syringe is used to inject a small amount of medication into the thigh or shoulder. If necessary, it can be injected through clothing. Another dose can be administered if no improvements are seen in 2-3 minutes. For intranasal administration, an applicator called an atomizer is used to spray the medication into the nose of the overdose victim. For this type of administration, a second dose should be administered if no improvements are seen in 3-5 minutes. The materials needed to administer naloxone (the syringe or atomizer) are usually provided in an overdose kit when you complete a naloxone administration training. They can also be purchased at pharmacies that carry naloxone. Naloxone acts quickly, but its effects wear off after 30-90 minutes. The overdose victim may stop breathing again when the medication wears off. For this reason, you should always call 911 when an overdose is suspected, even if you are able to administer naloxone.



Is it safe?

Naloxone is safe to use when you suspect an opioid overdose. You cannot get high or overdose on naloxone, and it is not addictive. Serious side effects, including allergic reactions, are rare. However, you should still always call 911 in case the person who overdosed needs additional medical care.

Is it legal?

In the State of Maryland, it is legal for individuals to carry naloxone and the supplies needed to administer it. Additionally, “Good Samaritan” laws protect people who administer naloxone from liability. This means that if you administer naloxone or call 911 because you reasonably believe that someone is experiencing an overdose, you cannot be prosecuted for crimes related to possession of a dangerous substance, possession of drug paraphernalia, or providing alcohol to minors. You also cannot be sued for damages.

Additional resources

For more information about naloxone, please visit::

- Prescribe to Prevent:
 - <http://www.prescribetoprevent.org>
- The Baltimore Student Harm Reduction Coalition
 - <http://baltimoreharmreduction.org>
- The Maryland Opioid Response Program
 - <http://go.umd.edu/marylandORP>