

Take Home Naloxone: Background

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. Research has shown that having naloxone available does not lead to increased use of opioids. Naloxone has fewer side effects than an epi-pen (which is a commonly used antidote to allergies).

Naloxone can be given by injection (into the vein or muscle or under the skin). While other forms of naloxone exist (such as nasal spray), injection is the only form approved by Health Canada. 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.

How to help someone avoid the negative effects of an opioid overdose: 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 (THN) programs provide naloxone to people who misuse opioids (legally prescribed or illegally obtained) and are at risk of an opioid overdose, and those who have been determined by a health professional to be likely to benefit from receiving a THN kit. Naloxone is not intended to replace emergency care.

It is still important to call 911 in the event of an overdose.

About 85% of overdoses happen when other people are around, so having naloxone available can help save a life and can 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 overdose.

Calling 911 is important when you deal with an opioid overdose.

Aside from administering naloxone, it is also important to stay with that person while awaiting medical personnel to arrive. Some longer acting opioids (such as methadone) may last longer in the body than naloxone, so an overdose could return. 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.

The effect of naloxone begins to wear off after 30 minutes, so the overdose may return. This will depend on a few factors such as: how much of the drug was taken, the person's metabolism (ability to break down the drugs) and other medical conditions. Seeking medical attention is a crucial part of helping ensure that the person will be safe, regardless of whether they have other medical conditions.

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/addictions for up-to-date information and resources.

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

- visit www.saskatchewan.ca/addictions
- check the green pages of your phone book for your local health region's services;
- 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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