

# Recognizing an overdose

An opioid overdose can take minutes or even hours to occur.

A person who is having an overdose may experience **slow breathing** (less than one breath every five seconds), **shallow breathing** or **no breathing**.

Other symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Blue or pale lips, skin or fingernails
- Snoring or gurgling noises while asleep or nodding out
- No response when you rub your knuckles in the middle of their chest (see right)
- Pale or clammy face



Call 9-1-1 immediately if you know or suspect someone is experiencing an overdose.

If you seek medical attention for someone who has overdosed, Wisconsin Law protects you from arrest for possessing drugs or drug paraphernalia.

**PLAY IT SAFE!**

Talk to your family or friends about a care plan in case of an overdose.

For patient education and additional materials, visit:

- [www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids) or
- [www.prescribetoprevent.org](http://www.prescribetoprevent.org)

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# OPIOID SAFETY AND OVERDOSE PREVENTION



## A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS AND CAREGIVERS:

*What you need to know about risks, prevention and more*



Wisconsin Pharmacy  
Examining Board



Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services

## What is naloxone?



**Naloxone (Narcan®) is:**  
a medication that can reverse an overdose caused by an opioid drug.

### What naloxone isn't:

- It **does not** reverse drug overdoses that are caused by non-opioid drugs.
- It will not cause harm if given to someone who is not experiencing an opioid overdose.
- It cannot be abused and is not addictive.

### Opioids include:

- Prescription pain medication, such as:
  - morphine
  - Percocet®
  - codeine
  - OxyContin®
  - Vicodin®
- Medicines used for opioid treatment, such as methadone, Suboxone® and Vivitrol®
- Heroin and fentanyl

**For any signs of overdose, use naloxone.**

**Storage:** Naloxone needs to be stored away from extreme heat or cold and kept away from direct sunlight.

**Expiration Date:** Check expiration date on the box of naloxone on a regular basis (once per month) and return for a refill if it's expired.

*"A growing body of evidence suggests that provision of naloxone does not encourage opiate users to increase their drug consumption, nor does it increase the likelihood that they will harm themselves or those around them."*

- National Institutes of Health Report

## Risk factors for overdose

**TOLERANCE:** Tolerance can decrease rapidly when someone takes a break from using an opioid. Restarting at the same dose puts you at risk for an overdose.

**PHYSICAL HEALTH:** Opioids can impair breathing. If you have asthma or other breathing problems, you are at high risk for overdose. Those with liver and/or kidney problems or who are HIV positive are also at increased risk.

**PREVIOUS OVERDOSE:** A person who has had a nonfatal overdose in the past has an increased risk of a fatal overdose in the future.

**MIXING DRUGS:** Many overdoses occur when opioids are mixed with alcohol, benzos (sedatives/anti-anxiety medicine) or other substances.

## How to prevent overdose

- Only take medication prescribed to you, and take it as directed.
- Don't mix opioids with other drugs or alcohol.
- Dispose of any unused medication at a medication drop box or police station.
- Store your medication in a safe and secure place, (e.g., lock box) to prevent access by children or others in your home.
- Not taking opioids for a while changes tolerance levels, which means if you restart, you need to start at a lower dose.
- Avoid taking opioids alone. Have someone nearby to help in case of an emergency.

