

Why You Should Carry Naloxone—Even If You’re Not a Drug User

The short and simple answer is: because it saves lives.

One of the most effective drug overdose prevention tools available today is naloxone (brand name *Narcan*)—a life-saving medication that reverses opioid overdoses.

Many people associate opioid overdoses with illegal drug use, but prescription opioids are strong medications health care providers use also if someone is in severe pain, such as morphine, oxycodone, or fentanyl. These prescription opioids have an important role in medicine, but they are also very addictive, which can lead to misuse and eventually overdose. People taking prescription opioids, whether long-term for chronic pain or for a short-term issue (such as a surgery) can experience accidental overdoses too.

Then there are the non-prescription opioids—think heroin and illegally purchased fentanyl for drug trafficking. Fentanyl purchased illegally is quite powerful. There are sometimes hundreds of doses just in one pill. Fentanyl is now showing up in other drugs, such as cocaine, methamphetamine, pills and other illicit drugs — there have even been reports of fentanyl found in marijuana. It’s important for anyone who uses these drugs to have naloxone on hand, to use a small amount at a time, and to *never use alone*. These opioids are not made by pharmacists, so the dosing can vary greatly. It’s like playing roulette every time the drug is taken. A single dose of what someone ‘thinks’ they’re getting could be fatal.

Naloxone is the antidote for opioid poisoning. It’s not addictive and has very few negative effects. Naloxone knocks opioids off their receptors all around the body. This medication is FDA approved and can be administered by anyone—even people who don’t use drugs or don’t think they know anyone that uses drugs—and you don’t need a prescription to obtain it. It is available as an easy-to-use nasal spray.

Symptoms of someone having an overdose may include slow and shallow breathing, blue or ashy lips or fingers, won’t wake up, vomiting, and snoring/gurgling sounds. If you see someone with these symptoms, the first action is to call 9-1-1 right away. If you have naloxone, give it immediately even if you are unsure if someone is having an overdose. If they *are* having an overdose, naloxone is the best first action. If they *are not* having an overdose—think stroke or heart attack—it will not hurt them to have naloxone. Follow the instruction on the naloxone package you have. It is as easy as inserting the nozzle into one nostril and pressing the plunger to release the medication, just like a basic nose spray. If the person does not respond in 2-5 minutes, give a 2nd dose. Continue other emergency activities, like CPR or using an AED, until emergency crews arrive.

Ohio has a Good Samaritan Law that protects people who respond to an overdose from civil liability. It also grants immunity for a minor drug possession or drug paraphernalia offense for the person who overdosed AND the person who called 9-1-1 for help.

It is a common misconception that fentanyl can be absorbed through the skin, but it is not true for casual exposure. Of course a person should avoid touching any unidentified powder, but you can't overdose on fentanyl by touching a doorknob or dollar bill. The one case in which fentanyl *can* be absorbed through the skin is with a special doctor-prescribed fentanyl skin patch, and even then, it takes hours of exposure.

Free naloxone kits are available at the *Meigs County Health Department* on a first-come, first-served basis to community members who want to be prepared and trained to administer it in the event of a possible opioid overdose. For questions or to obtain a kit, you can call 740-992-6626 and ask to speak with one of the nurses.

You never know when you'll encounter someone in your neighborhood in need of this life-saving medication. Sporting event, grocery store, party, parking lot, friend/family's house, -- basically anywhere. You can keep it in your purse or even in your car for when you might need it. Carrying Narcan is an act of compassion and responsibility. It does not condone drug use. It simply acknowledges the reality of the opioid crisis and offers a way to save lives, which in turn can help reduce the ripple effect of trauma that an overdose death can have on that person's friends and loved ones for generations to come.

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