

Opioid Overdose Overview

What is an opioid overdose?

Opioids are a type of drug known as a “depressant” which slows down bodily functions such as breathing. An opioid overdose occurs when too much of an opioid enters the body and slows someone’s breathing down so much that they are breathing too slowly to keep oxygen moving through their body or they stop breathing completely. This leads to *anoxia*, or lack of oxygen. If the brain does not have enough oxygen for too long, the person can die.

Common signs of an opioid overdose include:

- Person is unconscious or not waking up
- Doesn’t respond to shouting or rubbing knuckles on breastbone or between upper lip and nose
- Person is not breathing normally
 - Breathing very slowly or not breathing
 - Snoring, choking, or gurgling sounds

If you suspect someone is experiencing an opioid overdose:

1. Call 911
2. Give Narcan® if you have it
3. Begin rescue breathing and chest compression
4. If a person starts to breath on their own, you can move them into a recovery position to protect their airway

What is Narcan®?

Narcan® (the generic name is naloxone) is a medication that is used to temporarily move opioids off of the parts of the brain that control breathing to let the person experiencing an opioid overdose to start breathing again. Narcan® is very effective and in Vermont most opioid overdoses are able to be reversed using 1 or 2 doses (4mg) of Narcan®. Narcan® does not destroy the opioids in someone’s body, it simply replaces the opioid in the brain that controls breathing. Narcan® does not stay active in the body for a long period of time. It is very important for someone to be evaluated by medical personnel after experiencing an overdose, especially in case they experience a second overdose after Narcan® is no longer active in the body.



What is xylazine?

Xylazine is a sedative medication used in veterinary sciences. It has not been FDA approved for human use and is not an opioid. Xylazine has been added to the opioid drug supply and has been seen in Vermont. Because xylazine is a sedative, it may make someone unconscious, and they will not wake up until the drug has worn off. Narcan® does not reverse xylazine. If it is suspected that someone has xylazine in their system, 911 should be called immediately. Rescue breathing and chest compressions should be started immediately if the person is not breathing.

For more information on overdose prevention strategies: visit [knowodvt.com](https://www.knowodvt.com)

Overview of Narcan® Distribution in Vermont

The Health Department has partnered with over 120 community organizations to distribute free Narcan® to Vermonters. In calendar year 2022 nearly 52,000 doses of Narcan® were sent from the Health Department to community partners for distribution. **Information on where to find free Narcan® can be found at:** vthelplink.org and healthvermont.gov/naloxone.

Narcan® is distributed in Vermont through partner organizations through 3 distribution pathways:

Narcan Kits: These kits include 2 doses of 4 mg nasal naloxone (Narcan®) and instructions provided by the Department of Health. The intention of this pathway is to provide Narcan® to people with whom the organization has the opportunity to provide other resources or will likely have, an ongoing relationship. The intention of this pathway is to allow for ongoing conversations to happen about overdose prevention methods, treatment and recovery supports, and other harm reduction information. Narcan kits should be used when there is likely to be the opportunity to have these conversations.

Harm Reduction Packs: Harm Reduction Packs are intended to be offered to people where there is a high likelihood there will not be an ongoing relationship with the individual or within outreach settings for those who may not be engaged with recovery and harm reduction services. These packs include 2 doses of 4 mg nasal naloxone (Narcan®), instructions provided by the Department of Health, and information on a variety of topics including but not limited to harm reduction, treatment and recovery services, HIV and hepatitis C fact sheets and prevention methods, and other harm reduction information.

First Responder Leave Behind Kits: Leave Behind Kits are provided to people following an interaction with a first responder such as law enforcement or EMS. EMS are required to offer Leave Behind Kits to individuals who refuse transportation to the hospital following an opioid overdose. EMS are also encouraged to provide these in any circumstance in which opioid use might be indicated, even if the original call to the first responder was not opioid related. These kits include two doses of 4 mg Narcan®, instructions, information on harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services, and information on Vermont 211.

For more information contact: naloxone@vermont.gov