

# Naloxone: A Lifesaving Tool Against Opioid Overdose

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## What Is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a medicine that can temporarily stop an opioid overdose by blocking the effects of opioids on the brain, which can save a person's life. Commonly used opioids include pills to reduce pain (oxycontin, Vicodin, Percocet, etc.), heroin, fentanyl, and others. Narcan® is the most common version of naloxone and comes as a nasal spray version available over-the-counter in pharmacies and through community and public health programs at health departments (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2022).

## Why Is Naloxone Important?

Substance-related overdoses are increasing in the U.S. In 2022, there were 107,941 overdose deaths nationwide, with 68% involving synthetic opioids like fentanyl (NIDA, 2024). In Utah, 577 people died from overdoses in 2022, and 70% of these deaths involved opioids (Utah Department of Health and Human Services [UDHHS], 2023; UDHHS 2025). Naloxone can prevent many of these deaths by offering a chance to reverse an overdose.

## How to Recognize Signs of Opioid Overdose?



Figure 1. Overdose Signs

### to Recognize

Figure credit: Chapel Taylor-Olsen

When a person takes too many opioids, it sends a message to the brain to stop breathing, which is called respiratory depression. This causes the body to slowly shut down, ending in death if breathing is not restored. Figure 1 summarizes the possible key signs when a person overdoses on an opioid (Lynn & Galinkin, 2017; Sacco et al., n.d.; Straus et al., 2013; Stop the Opioid Epidemic, 2016).

## Is Naloxone Safe?

Yes, naloxone is very safe and can be used on people of all ages, even animals. It won't harm someone who hasn't overdosed on opioids. However, it's important to stay with the person until help arrives because opioids last longer in the body than naloxone does, which means the person could overdose again after the naloxone wears off. After giving naloxone, the person might have withdrawal symptoms like sweating, nausea, or a fast heartbeat (FDA, 2023).

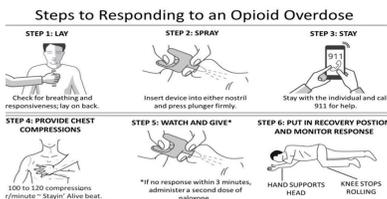
## How Can I Get Naloxone?

Narcan, the nasal spray version of naloxone, is available over-the-counter for about \$45 at most pharmacies (NIDA, 2022). Most insurance plans should cover this medication, but you may need to call or talk to a pharmacist to review your plan's details. If cost is an issue, you can receive free naloxone kits at several locations listed on the . Use this created by Utah Naloxone to find locations near you.

## How to Administer Narcan to Reverse an Opioid Overdose

Figure 2 covers the steps in responding to an opioid overdose. Please remember to always call 911 and that you can provide multiple doses of Narcan. You can also provide chest compressions and rescue breathing to prolong the time the person can survive without breathing.

It is important to stay with those who have overdosed until emergency services arrive. Naloxone will only stay in a person's system for 60 to 90 minutes, whereas opioids can last much longer (NIDA, 2022), leaving the possibility of re-overdose when the naloxone wears off (Mayo Clinic, 2024). Opioid withdrawal symptoms can occur after administering naloxone, including fever, sweating, irritability, nausea, and fast heartbeat (Mayo Clinic, 2024).



**Figure 2.** Responding to an Opioid Overdose

Sources: Images courtesy of Massachusetts Department of Public Health (2019) and opioid overdose response information provided by Narcan (n.d.)

## Good Samaritan Law

*The Good Samaritan Law protects those trying to help someone experiencing an overdose, so don't hesitate to act to try and save a life.*

In Utah, the Good Samaritan Law protects people who help someone in an emergency, even if you have been using substances. This law was updated to encourage people to call 911 in all overdose emergencies. If you provide lifesaving care, you won't be held legally responsible unless you're grossly negligent. In addition, you shouldn't be charged for illegal drug use or possession unless you are on probation or parole (Utah State Legislature, 2023).

## Storage and Shelf Life

Keep Narcan at room temperature and protect it from sunlight or extremely hot or cold temperatures (Narcan, n.d.). Narcan will have an expiration date, and we recommend using it by this date, but recent studies indicate that Narcan may work one year or more past the expiration date (Schuyler-Pruyn et. al., 2019). Providing any Narcan, even expired, is better than doing nothing.

## Naloxone Training

Utah State University (USU) Extension offers in-person and online training for organizations. Email [Aaron Hunt](mailto:Aaron.Hunt@usu.edu) to schedule a Narcan training.

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