

Overdose Awareness and Response: A Community Responsibility

08/02/2024

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In recent years, the rise in drug overdoses has become a critical public health issue due in part to increasing access to fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid. In 2023, there were an estimated 107,543 overdose deaths in the United States, the majority of which were due to opioids (CDC, 2024). Overdose, whether intentional or accidental, can have devastating effects on individuals, families, and communities. Understanding overdose prevention and promoting awareness is crucial in combating this crisis and saving lives.

Understanding Overdose

An overdose occurs when someone consumes a toxic amount of a substance, whether drugs, alcohol, or a combination. This can lead to severe health complications and death. Common substances involved in overdoses include opioids (including prescription painkillers, fentanyl, heroin and others), benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium, Ativan), stimulants (such as cocaine and methamphetamine), and alcohol. Due to opioids being the most common, this article will focus on key prevention approaches you can take to protect your family and community.

High-Risk Groups

While anyone taking prescribed or illicit substances is at risk of overdose, there are certain groups have a higher risk which includes:

- People recently released from prison
- People who have been prescribed opioids, especially people 65 years and older
- Anyone who misuses opioids especially when mixing with alcohol or other substances
- Teens and college aged adults taking unused painkillers obtained at home or at a friend's house
- Anyone using substance bought off the internet or from drug dealers, due to many substances being contaminated with fentanyl.

Signs and Symptoms

Recognizing the signs of an opioid overdose can be lifesaving. The main impact of an opioid overdose is that it stops breathing and eventually may cause death due to lack of oxygen. The key signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose include:

- Unresponsiveness or unconsciousness
- Slow, irregular breathing, snoring, or gurgling sounds
- Slow or no pulse
- Pale or clammy skin
- Blue lips or fingertips

Overdose Response

If you suspect someone is overdosing, it's critical to act quickly. The best way to respond to an opioid overdose is to have access to [Narcan®](#), a nasal spray that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose. This medication is now available over the counter without the need for a prescription at pharmacies and many local health departments have programs to distribute to high-risk populations. Your insurance may cover this or reduce the cost. Please ensure you obtain and carry this and learn how to administer it to someone that is experiencing an opioid overdose. For more information, please visit our [website](#) to learn more.

Conclusion

Overdose prevention and awareness are vital in addressing the ongoing public health crisis. By educating ourselves and others, supporting those in need, and advocating for effective prevention strategies, we can

make a significant impact. Each of us has a role to play in saving lives and fostering a healthier, more informed community. Remember, every action counts in the fight against overdose.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2024, May 14). *U.S. Overdose Deaths Decrease in 2023, First Time Since 2018*. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2024/20240515.htm