

First Script Prescription Benefit News for Workers' Compensation

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Ask The Pharmacist

To suggest a topic, send an email to:
AskThePharmacist@cvty.us.com

How is naloxone used for opioid overdose?

Drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death for Americans under 50 years old, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2018, were responsible for 185 deaths per day in the U.S.¹ In recent years the progression of the opioid overdose epidemic has witnessed a shift toward overdose toxicity driven by synthetic opioids that are characterized by much higher potency (like fentanyl) or that are designed to provide extended duration of activity.² This and overdoses caused by multiple substances is cause for additional caution and the need to observe specific recommendations in the use of naloxone in emergency settings.

Naloxone is a very specific antidote, or reversal medication, used to treat opioid overdoses and their potentially fatal consequences. It acts by competing with opioids to bind at “mu” receptors in the brain. Because naloxone acts quickly when properly administered and binds at the mu receptor with greater affinity than the opioid, it displaces and reverses the effects of the opioid, including the potent suppression of breathing that opioid overdoses can cause. Naloxone in itself is not an opioid or an analgesic and does not share their potential to induce craving, tolerance, and addiction.

Naloxone is available in injectable (syringe and vial) formulations that are best suited for use in supervised health care settings like hospitals, as well as intranasal (e.g., Narcan®) and auto-injector (e.g., Evzio®) forms, which make administration by individuals with or without medical training more prompt and manageable in an emergency setting. It may be prescribed by a health care professional, and in many states can be obtained without a prescription from pharmacies that operate under standing orders from the state department of health where they are located.

Symptoms of opioid overdose include:³

- Slow or absent breathing
- Unusual sleepiness or unresponsiveness
- Tiny, constricted pupils
- Blue nail beds and lips
- Cold, clammy skin
- Slow heartbeat and/or low blood pressure

Any opioid overdose should be treated as a medical emergency. Witnesses should call 911 right away, after administering the first naloxone dose, even if the person wakes up. They should be closely observed following administration of naloxone and a second dose administered if symptoms return or do not appear to be resolving. The duration of many opioids, especially extended-release versions, are longer than naloxone (30-90 minutes) and necessitate careful, continued observation until emergency help arrives. New preparations of naloxone delivering higher doses to manage overdose toxicity of higher potency synthetic opioids are under investigation and approaching market approval.⁴

References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Drug Overdose Data. Accessed at: [https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html#:~:text=In%202018%2C%2067%2C367%20drug%20overdose,2018%20\(20.7%20per%20100%2C000\)](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html#:~:text=In%202018%2C%2067%2C367%20drug%20overdose,2018%20(20.7%20per%20100%2C000).).
2. United States Drug Enforcement Administration. Press Releases. Alarming spike in fentanyl related overdose deaths leads officials to issue public warning. Accessed at: <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2020/08/06/alarmspike-fentanyl-related-overdose-deaths-leads-officials-issue>
3. Narcan.com. Accessed at: https://www.narcan.com/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Narcan_National_Brand_Exact&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlxqa2-5aU7AIV4nICh1INAcQEAAYASAAEgKiaPD_BWE
4. Globe News Wire.com. Adamis Pharmaceuticals Resubmits ZIMHI New Drug Application to FDA. May 18, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/05/18/2034986/0/en/Adamis-Pharmaceuticals-Resubmits-ZIMHI-New-Drug-Application-to-FDA.html>



Governmental Activity by State

Find out more about the governmental updates and potential changes currently being proposed in your state

To find out more about the governmental updates and potential changes currently being proposed in your state, visit the [Coventry News and Insights page](#) each month to read our Government Relations Newsletter. Find this month's newsletter [here](#).

Narcan® (Naloxone HCl Nasal Spray)

Efforts to expand awareness, possession, and use of naloxone to combat overdose fatalities in the continuing U.S. epidemic are ongoing, even as the number of drug overdose deaths in 2018 approached 67,000, with 70% of those involving opioids.⁵ Many persons at risk for overdose, family members, and caregivers remain unaware that an opioid overdose treatment is available or how to use it. States have expanded the authority of pharmacists to dispense naloxone without a prescription and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is moving to update naloxone product labeling to encourage greater prescribing of naloxone and to accelerate the evaluation of over-the-counter versions.⁶

Narcan nasal spray is one of several commercially available preparations containing naloxone, a specific antidote used to reverse opioid overdose toxicity. Narcan is used for emergency administration in the setting of a known or suspected opioid overdose. The development of an intranasal method of administering naloxone has advanced the ease of use in community settings as it does not require specialized training to administer and is “needle-free.” The 4mg intranasal dose achieves comparable maximum serum concentrations of naloxone and has a longer half-life than a 0.4mg intramuscular injection.⁷ Narcan is packaged in two-dose units to provide an available second dose, if necessary, to treat an overdose.

A drug overdose is a medical emergency that calls for immediate medical attention. Emergency medical help should be contacted immediately after giving the first dose of Narcan. Persons experiencing an overdose should be carefully observed for any relapse of symptoms, even if they wake after Narcan is administered. Relapse of overdose symptoms may occur, requiring a second Narcan dose, before help arrives. Naloxone may provoke sudden opioid withdrawal symptoms in persons who have been using opioids regularly and some patients may exhibit aggressive behavior when an overdose is suddenly reversed.

According to Emergent Biosolutions, the makers of Narcan, Narcan has no effect in individuals who are not taking opioids and is not an opioid itself. Emergent Biosolutions says that it is safe and effective for use in children experiencing a known or suspected overdose.⁷ Family members, caregivers, or others who may need to use Narcan in an opioid overdose emergency should know where it is kept and how to administer a dose before an overdose occurs.⁸

The Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) describe a conditional recommendation for first-line use of intranasal naloxone (Narcan) or naloxone for injection (0.4mg/ml) in specified patients.* Naloxone auto-injector (Evzio®) is a second-line recommendation. Additional criteria for naloxone prescriptions for pre-hospital rescue in patients receiving prescribed opioids associated with a work-related injury are described.⁹

For additional information, please contact your First Script Account Manager or Account Pharmacist.

**Naloxone injection is more commonly used by trained medical professionals in a supervised health-care delivery setting.*

References:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. Accessed at: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>
- FDA.gov. Press Announcements. Statement on continued efforts to increase availability of all forms of naloxone to help reduce opioid overdose deaths. Accessed at: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/statement-continued-efforts-increase-availability-all-forms-naloxone-help-reduce-opioid-overdose>
- https://www.narcan.com/patients/what-is-an-opioid-overdose-emergency/#is_anchor
- NARCAN® Nasal Spray [prescribing information]. ADAPT Pharma, Inc. Plymouth Meeting, PA; 2020 Accessed at: <https://www.narcan.com/>
- The Official Disability Guidelines. Accessed at: www.odgbymcg.com

Clinical Updates

FDA issues guidance for continued use of recalled albuterol inhaler(s)

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has published an alert to health care professionals and patients regarding a voluntary recall of all unexpired albuterol sulfate inhalation aerosol manufactured for Perrigo Pharmaceutical Company due to possible clogging of the inhaler mechanism. To find out more read the [bulletin](#).

FDA updates boxed label warnings for benzodiazepines

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) published a safety communication on September 23, 2020 announcing required changes to the approved labeling of all benzodiazepine medications and to related patient medication guides. To find out more read the [bulletin](#).

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