

Preventing opioid overdose

Do you know how to prevent an overdose?
Here's what you need to know.

Risk of intoxication and overdose

An opioid overdose can happen when a person:

- uses a drug in a way they don't normally use it (e.g., crushing, smoking or snorting pills, or injecting instead of swallowing)
- takes an opioid that their body isn't used to
- relapses or uses after a period of not consuming drugs
- switches to a stronger opioid or switches to heroin
- changes where they get their opioids
- mixes street drugs and/or alcohol and/or medications (e.g., opioid painkillers, antidepressants, sedatives, anti-seizure meds)
- takes a higher dose than they're used to
- is sick or tired, has liver or kidney damage, or has an illness that affects their breathing
- has a period of not using (e.g., when in custody).



Preventing overdose

- Avoid mixing drugs and alcohol. Your risk of overdose goes up if you mix opioids with alcohol, sleeping pills or anxiety pills, other opioids, or many prescription medications.
- Don't use opioids alone or in an unfamiliar setting.
- If you're using opioids after a period of cutting down or not using, be sure to start low and go slow. After even a few days without using, a dose that might once have been fine could kill you.
- If you switch to a stronger opioid, use less and do a test dose.
- Remember that the risk of overdose goes up when you increase or change the opioid dose or use a new supply.

Signs of overdose

A person may have overdosed if:

- they are not breathing at all or are breathing very slowly
- their lips and fingertips are turning blue or purple
- they are asleep and making an unusual gurgling or loud snoring sound
- they can't be woken and/or don't respond to pain (e.g., pinching)
- the person is “on the nod” (falling asleep).

What to do if someone has overdosed

- Call 911 right away and ask for an ambulance.
- Shake the person and shout their name.
- Give the person Narcan (naloxone) if available.
- Turn them on their side to prevent choking.
- Stay with the person until help arrives.

Resources and links

Opioid Resource Hub: www.porticonetwork.ca/web/opioid-resource-hub/home

Contact the Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program for information and resources on opioid overdose prevention and response: www.ohrdp.ca/opioid-overdose-prevention or 1 866 316-2217.

For more information on preventing, recognizing and responding to an overdose, see the U.S. Harm Reduction Coalition's Opioid Overdose Basics page: <http://harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/overview/overdose-basics>.

In the longer term, addiction treatment is strongly recommended. Contact ConnexOntario at 1 800 565-8603 or www.connexontario.ca for available addiction treatment resources in your area.

You can also visit the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Ontario's Narcotic Strategy home page for a list of resources and references: www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/drugs/ons/resources.aspx