

# Communiversality Developed and Tested Toolkit for Opioid Abuse Abatement



## Module 4

# Preventing Opioid Deaths — Availability and Use of Naloxone

**This chapter is tailored toward those in the throes of opioid addiction. It is critical to hospitals after discharge, those released from incarceration, and harm-reduction organizations. It is also important for the general public to know this life-saving information.**

*This chapter focuses on life-saving information; this chapter can give you a plan of action.*

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# Preventing Opioid Deaths: Availability and Use of Naloxone

Medication is available that can counteract an opioid overdose, and it can help save lives. Carry and learn how to use naloxone/Narcan in the event you are nearby when someone has had too much heroin, fentanyl, or any prescription opioid medication.

The opioid crisis is devastating, but we have ways to reduce its impacts, including the death rate. Please prevent opioid misuse; share information about opioid treatment; carry Narcan; seek treatment; and pledge to inform others.



## What Is Naloxone?

### Definition

Naloxone is a life-saving medication that can counteract an overdose of opioids, including heroin, fentanyl, and prescription opioid medications. Naloxone/Narcan is available in most states without a prescription, is easy to use, and light to carry. Carrying naloxone with you can help save lives (CDC, 2023).

Naloxone is now available over the counter at Walgreens, other drug stores, and at some local grocery stores. It's about \$45/two doses. However, it is free in two Durham locations.

One is at the local Durham County Detention Center, 219 S. Mangum St., Durham, NC 27701 which is open 24/7, and another is free at the Durham County Public Health Center at 414 E. Main St., Durham, NC 27701 during business hours.

- Bystanders with naloxone can help save the life of a person who has overdosed on opioids.
- Those struggling with opioid use disorder (OUD) should carry naloxone and keep it at home. (80 percent of overdose deaths occur at home).
- Because you can't use naloxone on yourself, let others know you have it in case you experience an opioid overdose.
- Carrying naloxone is especially recommended for people who are taking high-dose opioid medications (greater or equal to 50 morphine mg equivalents per day), people who use opioids and benzodiazepines together, or people who use illicit opioids like heroin or fentanyl.

## What Is Opvee?

### Definition

New Prescription Nasal Spray is more effective than Narcan, especially with fentanyl overdoses. It's stronger and lasts longer but has more side effects.

For more information: "Opvee vs. Narcan: 6 Similarities and Differences Between These Opioid Reversal Medications" in *Good RX Health* by Jennifer Gershman & Stacia Woodcock (2023).



# Recognizing Signs of an Opioid Overdose and How to Respond

## What Happens during an Overdose?

Death from an opioid overdose happens when too much of the drug overwhelms the brain and interrupts the body's natural desire to breathe. During an overdose, breathing can be dangerously slowed or stopped, causing brain damage or death.

## RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE

(SAMHSA, 2023)



Sleepy,  
Unresponsive



Shallow Breathing,  
Gurgling, Snoring



Pinpoint  
Pupils



Blue Lips,  
Nails, Skin



Cold Clammy  
Skin



Nausea,  
Vomiting

## RESPONDING TO AN OVERDOSE

(CDC, n.d.)

### STIMULATION

Shout or call to the person to wake up. No response? Rub on center of chest with your knuckles. If there is a response, keep the person awake until help arrives.

### GIVE NAXOLONE

Give naloxone. If still unconscious after 2-3 minutes, do rescue breaths again and give another dose of naloxone.

### CALL FOR HELP

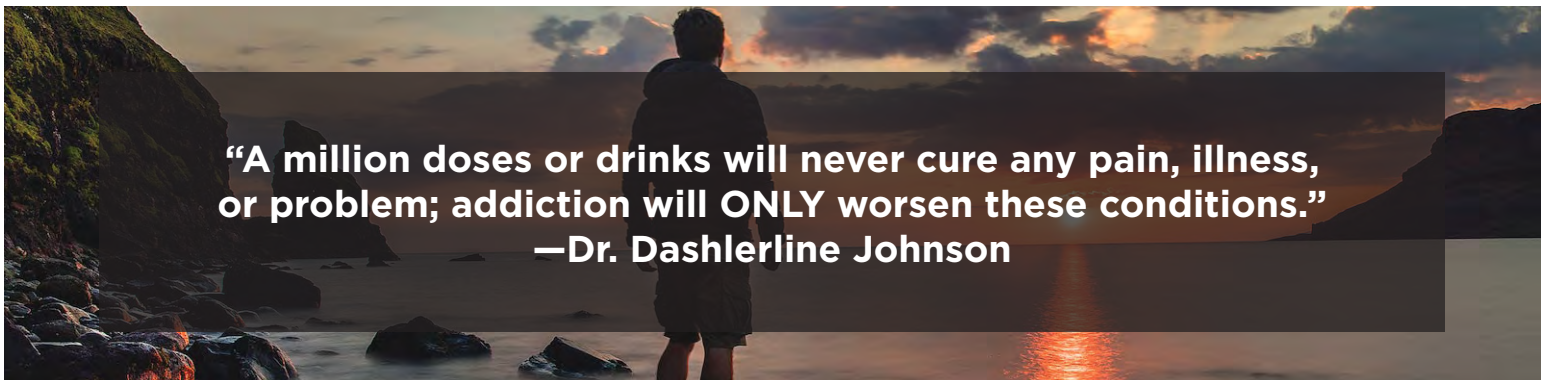
Call 911. Say: "A person has overdosed or is unresponsive."

### RESCUE BREATHING

Make sure mouth is clear. Tilt head up and perform rescue breathing.

### RECOVERY POSITION

Put person into recovery position. Angle head down in case of vomiting. Stay with person until help arrives



**"A million doses or drinks will never cure any pain, illness, or problem; addiction will ONLY worsen these conditions."**

**—Dr. Dashlerline Johnson**

## Risk Factors

### Several factors can increase a person's risk of overdosing.

1. Changes in tolerance may occur after not using opioids or using less of them, such as after in-patient treatment or incarceration.
2. Changes in the drug supply.
3. Mixing opioids with respiratory depressants or “downers,” such as alcohol or benzodiazepines (benzos), can slow down the central nervous system and can lead to extreme sleepiness, slow or difficulty in breathing, coma, or even death (DEA, 2020).
4. Mixing opioids with stimulants, such as cocaine and methamphetamine.
5. Having chronic health conditions such as HIV, hepatitis C, lung disease, heart disease, or other health concerns.
6. History of past overdoses.

Source: (Mass.gov. 2023)

### Alcohol and Opioids: A Deadly Combo

A person who misuses alcohol has a greater risk of using at least one other substance, such as opioids, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin. Prolonged use of drugs and alcohol increases your tolerance, requiring more substances to achieve the same effects (Alcohol Rehab Guide: Recognizing a Drug and Alcohol Problem, May 2023).

Opioids and alcohol are both depressants that slow down breathing and impair judgment. Mixing them has a synergistic effect, meaning each substance is stronger when taken together than when taken separately, often leading to potentially fatal consequences, such as coma, brain damage, overdose, and death. Therefore, no amount of alcohol is considered safe when taking opioids.

Don't mix depressants (aka downers), including alcohol, opioids (heroin, morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, fentanyl), and benzodiazepines. Depressants can slow your breathing and increase your risk of death and other bad outcomes, such as damage to your brain and other organs. In other words, **DON'T DRINK WHEN YOU TAKE OPIOIDS.**

Mixing stimulants and depressants does not balance or cancel each other out. The results of combining drugs are unpredictable, often modifying or even masking the effects of one or both drugs, which may trick you into thinking that the drugs are not affecting you, making overdosing easier.

### Standard Drink Sizes

ABV = Alcohol by Volume. Distilled Spirits are gin, rum, vodka, whiskey, etc.



12 oz.  
5% ABV beer



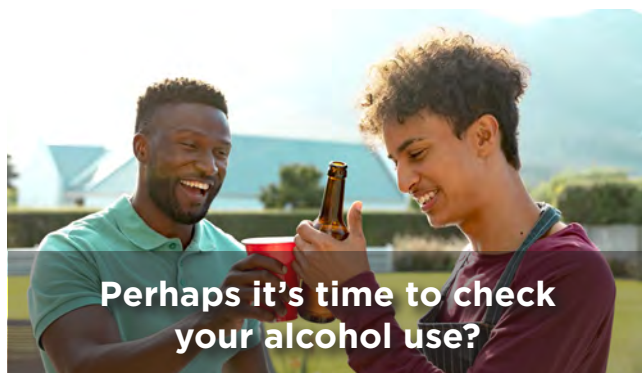
8 oz.  
7% ABV  
malt liquor



5 oz.  
12% ABV wine



1.5 oz.  
40% ABV  
distilled spirits



<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/CheckYourDrinking/>

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### Opioids + alcohol = BAD RESULTS, including (Geng, 2022):

- Respiratory depression and arrest
- Unconsciousness
- Cardiovascular risk
- Irregular heart rate
- Coma
- Nausea and vomiting
- Dehydration
- Changes in blood pressure
- Loss of coordination
- Dizziness
- Extreme lack of inhibition
- Unusual behavior
- Death

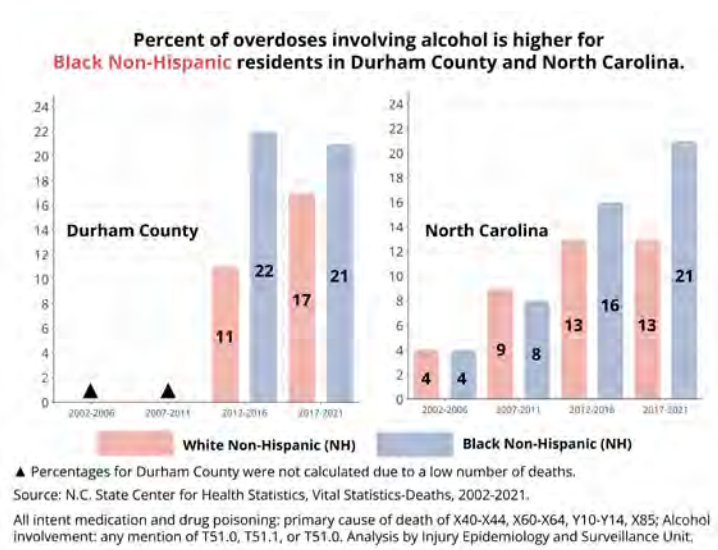
### Stimulants + opioids =

Stimulants (also known as Uppers) include Ecstasy (MDMA), cocaine, methamphetamines, and amphetamines (speed).

- Fast/troubled breathing
- Increased body temperature
- Nausea or vomiting
- Chest pain
- Seizures or tremors
- Brain injury
- Liver damage
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Death

Sources:

American Psychiatric Association (2022). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, 5TR. American Psychiatric Association.  
 Geng, Caitlin. (2022, Dec 7). What to know about alcohol and opioids. *Medical News Today*. Alcohol and opioid use: Risks, side effects, and more (medicalnewstoday.com)



**Definition: Speedballing**

Speedballing is taking cocaine and heroin together, which causes a “push-pull” reaction in the body that can be very dangerous. It is especially risky because it forces the body to process more types of drugs (<https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/illicit-drugs/>) simultaneously.

More about Speedball: <https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/heroin/speedball/>

## 5 Signs of an Opioid Overdose

If you see these signs, call 911.  
If prepared, administer naloxone.



American Society of Anesthesiologists®:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=US0jy7Xg3Gg>

## What You Need to Know about Providing Medical Assistance

**Under North Carolina's Good Samaritan Law, you may not be prosecuted for certain drug offenses under the following conditions.**

- You seek medical assistance for someone experiencing a drug-related overdose by contacting the 911 system, a law enforcement officer, or emergency medical services personnel.
- You are the first person to seek medical assistance for the overdose victim.
- You provide your name to the 911 system or to a law enforcement officer upon arrival.
- Law enforcement officers were not already at your location executing an arrest warrant, search warrant, or other lawful search.
- Any evidence for prosecution of a drug-related offense obtained by a law enforcement authority was obtained because you sought medical assistance for a drug-related overdose.

Learn more about the Safe to Call campaign, which encourages teens and young adults to call 911 to help prevent deaths due to drug overdose and alcohol (More Powerful NC, n.d.).

### Protect Friends and Family with Lifesaving Naloxone (CDC)



CDC: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM0wxoMTp1Y&v=US0jy7Xg3Gg>

### You Need to Know

#### “Who Should Carry Naloxone?”

<https://www.asahq.org/madeforthismoment/pain-management/opioid-treatment/opioid-abuse/>

#### “Life-saving Naloxone” (April 21, 2023)

<https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/naloxone/>

#### FDA approves first over-the-counter version of opioid overdose antidote Narcan

Younang et al., 2023; Help Keep Yourself and Others Safe (CDC, n.d.) Video.

Barriers to access include cost/affordability (\$45 – \$150), insurance coverage, and access, among others.

## Fentanyl Test Strips (FTS)


Fentanyl test strips can detect the presence of fentanyl in drug samples. FTS are a reliable means of providing people at risk of fentanyl exposure with more information, which can decrease the risk of overdose. They cost \$1 or \$2 per strip, but may be free from local health departments.

 **Fentanyl**

 **No Fentanyl**

FTS may be obtained at your local health department, needle-exchange programs (that distribute clean syringes) in your community, and/or vending machines in some states.

Use instructions: Dip the BTNX strip into a sample of the drug dissolved in water. One line indicates that fentanyl is present. Two lines mean it is negative for fentanyl. (No line means the test is invalid).



**Drugs impact many areas of life. Good treatment also needs to reach those areas.**

### Test Your Knowledge (answer yes or no)

1. You need a prescription to obtain naloxone (Narcan).
2. Pinpoint pupils, slow breathing, and pale or blue skin are all symptoms of an overdose.
3. Even prescription opioids can be dangerous, and anyone can become addicted.
4. It is safe to take opioids with other drugs.
5. Some side effects of taking opioids are increased pain sensitivity, constipation, nausea, vomiting, and depression.

Answers: 1 = No. 2 = Yes. 3 = Yes. 4 = No. 5 = Yes.