



TAKE HOME NALOXONE (THN): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

QUICK FACTS:

- **Naloxone is safe and has been used in Canada for more than 40 years**
- **Naloxone is available only through prescription via Street Health Opioid Overdose Prevention Program (SHOOPP)**
- **Naloxone is only effective for opioid overdoses**
- **Naloxone does not increase the likelihood of people overdosing**
- **Naloxone training and education has been shown to reduce mortality of opioid overdoses in the communities where programs are available**

What is naloxone?

Naloxone, or Narcan®, is an emergency antidote to opioid overdose. It has been used in Canada for the past 40 years. It is recommended as an Essential Medicine by the World Health Organization. An overdose of opioid drugs such as fentanyl, morphine, heroin, methadone or oxycodone can stop a person's breathing and result in death. Giving naloxone in an overdose emergency can save a person's life by restoring normal breathing and consciousness. It does **not** work for non-opioid overdoses (like cocaine, ecstasy, GHB or alcohol). But, if an overdose involves multiple substances, including opioids, naloxone helps by temporarily removing the opioid from the equation.

How is naloxone given?

Naloxone can be given through clothing into the muscle of the upper arm, upper leg, or buttock. Safety needles (self-retracting) are provided with the naloxone kit to avoid needle-stick injuries and facilitate safe needle disposal.

How does naloxone work?

When naloxone is given during an opioid overdose, naloxone will knock the opioids off the receptors and restore breathing. Naloxone acts fast (usually within 1-5 minutes), and lasts for about 20 to 120 minutes. If large doses or strong opioids (like fentanyl), or long-acting opioids (like methadone) are involved, the overdose can recur after the first dose of naloxone has been given. This means another dose of naloxone may be needed. Each take home naloxone kit contains two doses of naloxone. It is always important to **call 911 when someone overdoses**.

Why is it important to stay with an individual after giving them naloxone?

As stated above, overdoses can recur when naloxone wears off. To make it less likely that an overdose will return, it is important to make sure that the individual knows not to take more drugs for several hours. In addition, you may need to tell them what happened, as they may be confused.

What is in a naloxone kit?

Naloxone kits include: hard shelled sunglasses case with alcohol swabs, latex free gloves, rescue breathing mask, 2 vials of naloxone, 2 x 3 cc safety syringes, vial snappers, identification card, and steps to respond to an overdose.

Can naloxone be harmful or be abused?

Naloxone has no abuse potential. Naloxone cannot get a person high, and does not encourage opioid use. While naloxone is a very safe drug, it may cause individuals dependent on opioids to go into withdrawal. However, the small doses found in the take home naloxone kits minimize this risk. Research has shown that having naloxone available does not increase the likelihood of overdoses.

Are there risks associated with using naloxone?

The only contraindication to naloxone is hypersensitivity or allergy to the ingredients. Naloxone may cause opioid withdrawal in those with opioid dependence. Withdrawal symptoms include pain, high blood pressure, sweating, agitation and irritability. In addition, it can be unsettling to come out of an overdose unaware of what has happened.

What happens during overdose education and naloxone training?

Participants are taught how to reduce overdose risk, recognize different types of overdose (i.e. stimulant, depressant), and respond appropriately. Appropriate response to an opioid overdose includes calling 911, performing rescue breathing, placing someone in the recovery position (if you have to leave them, or if breathing has been restored), and administering naloxone. These skills are not a substitute for professional medical care, but can help keep someone alive until an ambulance arrives.

Do you need to be a medical professional to recognize opioid overdose and administer naloxone?

No. Research and experience shows that training families, peers and people who use drugs how to recognize an overdose and administer naloxone reduces deaths from opioid overdoses. Community based overdose prevention programs are empowering. They give peers, friends, and families of people who use drugs the chance to save a life, and send a clear message to those who use drugs that their lives matter. However, the availability of take home naloxone does not replace the need for emergency care or minimize the importance of calling 911.

Where are Take Home Naloxone programs already established?

Naloxone has successfully reversed countless opioid overdoses worldwide. The US has over 180 Take Home Naloxone programs, resulting in an estimated 10,000 overdose reversals. Scotland and Australia have national Take Home Naloxone programs. BC, AB and ON have THN programs.

Who has access to naloxone now in Ontario?

In 2013, the Ontario Naloxone Program (ONP) started providing take home naloxone through the following qualified organizations: Public Health Units that manage a core Needle Syringe Program (NSP), Community-based organizations that have been contracted by their local Public Health unity to manage a core NSP and Ministry funded Hepatitis C teams. There are currently 16 programs in Ontario that provide THN.

Why are opioid overdoses an important public health issue in Ontario?

From 2000 to 2013, there has been a 463% increase in opioid related deaths. In Ontario, opioid overdose now ranks as the third leading cause of accidental death. In 2013 625 people died from opioid overdoses, that's 1 person every 14 hours. Naloxone is a life-saving therapy that can reduce these deaths and injuries.

How do I get a kit?

If you have history of opioid use or are at risk of overdose or would like to receive training in responding to opioid overdoses please call **STREET HEALTH CENTRE at 613-549-1440**. Walk-ins are welcome.