



The Naloxone Program - Frequently Asked Questions

What is naloxone?

Naloxone is a medication which is used to temporarily reverse the effects of an overdose of opioid drugs. There is no other use for naloxone.

What are opioids and how do they work?

Opioids are drugs derived directly from the poppy plant such as morphine, codeine, and opium; as well as synthetic or semisynthetic drugs that work in a similar manner, such as oxycodone, methadone, hydromorphone and heroin. Certain opioids are used to treat pain, while others may be used because of the pleasant feelings that result ("the high"). Opioid drugs can be taken by mouth, snorted, injected, smoked or absorbed through the skin via a patch.

Opioids bind with receptors in the brain, spinal cord and other parts of the body. When they bind to certain receptors, they decrease pain so that people can better cope. However, opioid drugs can cause side effects such as sleepiness, constipation and dependence, and if too much opioids are taken, overdose can result which can slow breathing and lead to death.

What causes an opioid overdose and what happens when someone overdoses?

Overdoses usually occur accidentally when someone takes too much of an opioid dose for their body to handle. This can happen if someone has just started using an opioid drug; resumes taking an opioid drug after a period of not taking one for a while; switches from one opioid drug to another; takes more than their usual opioid dose; takes more than one drug at the same time; or develops an illness when taking opioid drugs. When an overdose occurs, breathing becomes slower and shallower, and in more serious overdoses, stops completely. This may result in loss of consciousness, brain damage and death.

How does naloxone work?

Naloxone temporarily blocks opioids from binding to the receptors in the brain and body, thereby restoring breathing and preventing brain damage and death. In Middlesex-London, naloxone will be given by means of an injection into the arm or thigh muscle. A second dose of naloxone may be necessary within three to five minutes if the overdose is not reversed within that time frame. During an overdose, other life-saving measures are also very important, such as performing basic life support and calling 911. Emergency medical care is critical as the effects of the naloxone wear off in about 30 to 90 minutes and overdose symptoms may return.

Can naloxone be misused?

There is no use for naloxone other than the temporary reversal of opioid overdose. It has no potential for misuse.

Won't access to naloxone result in more opioid misuse?

Studies of opioid overdose prevention programs that use community naloxone distribution have found no increase in legal or illegal use of opioids. Many of the studies also found that people trained to give naloxone actually used opioids and other substances less often. Trainees also reported that their ability to help others has improved their knowledge, health, self-esteem, community-status and employment opportunities.