



OVERDOSE RESCUE 101

Setting the Facts Straight About Naloxone

“The heart of the challenge is the possibility that things could be different: overdose is a public health problem that can be solved. Unlike many of the other leading causes of death, death from opioid overdose is almost entirely preventable, and preventable at a low cost. Opioids kill by depressing respiration, a slow mode of death that leaves plenty of time for effective medical intervention. Overdose is rapidly reversed by the administration of a safe and inexpensive drug called naloxone. Naloxone strips clean the brain’s opioid receptors and reverses the respiratory depression causing almost immediate withdrawal. A growing number of harm reduction organizations in the United States are offering overdose prevention programs that provide injection drug users with resuscitation training and take-home doses of naloxone.”¹”

MYTH: Naloxone makes people violent

FACT: Only about 8% of patients wake up in “fight or flight” mode where they may become combative. This is especially rare if naloxone is administered by someone they know and trust.

MYTH: Naloxone will keep drug users from seeking treatment

FACT: Studies have shown that naloxone does not keep users from seeking treatment. In fact, for many people the experience of a drug overdose is enough to push them towards seeking treatment.

MYTH: We can’t trust a person who is high to respond appropriately in a life-threatening situation

FACT: Naloxone has been available to active drug users and their loved ones since 1996. According to a CDC report, over 26,000 successful overdose reversals have been reported by lay people and 82.8% of those reversals were done by active drug users.

MYTH: If you give an overdose antidote to drug users, they will abuse more drugs

FACT: Numerous studies on naloxone’s effect on drug use have shown that having naloxone available does not lead to more drug use or riskier drug use. Furthermore, naloxone causes opiate withdrawal symptoms, which acts as an effective abuse deterrent.

MYTH: Only medical professionals can determine if someone has overdosed and give Naloxone.

FACT: Research has shown that with basic training, non-medical responders, such as friends, co-workers, family members, or even concerned bystanders, can recognize when an overdose is occurring and give naloxone.

MYTH: Naloxone will prevent drug users from calling 911 for further medical assistance.

FACT: Without naloxone individuals may be reluctant to phone 911 for fear of potential legal consequences. However, training individuals in the management of opioid overdose and equipping them with naloxone gives them with the skills to intervene more effectively by increasing their confidence in managing an overdose situation. One of the cornerstones of naloxone and overdose response training is the importance of calling 911 and emphasizing that naloxone has a short duration of action; therefore, training increases the understanding of the necessity of medical follow up.

1 Source: Burris, Scott; Beletsky, Leo; Castagna, Carolyn; Coyle, Casey; Crowe, Colin; and McLaughlin, Jennie Maura, “Stopping an Invisible Epidemic: Legal Issues in the Provision of Naloxone to Prevent Opioid Overdose,” Drexel Law Review (Philadelphia, PA: Earle Mack School of Law, Spring 2009), Vol. 1, Number 2, p. 277. http://prescribeprevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/burris_stoppinganinvisibleepidemic.pdf

