

How and When to Give Naloxone

Naloxone, also called Narcan, is a medicine that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose—and save a life.

Anyone can learn how to use naloxone to revive a person who isn't breathing— and provide extra time to get help.

Opioids, also known as narcotics, are prescription medicines for pain.

Examples include fentanyl, oxycodone, and morphine.

Heroin is also a type of opioid.

So how do you know if someone is overdosing on opioids and it's time to use naloxone?

Here are some signs to look for: slow or shallow breathing; or gasping, snoring, or no breathing at all; small "pinpoint" pupils; blue lips or blue fingertips; no response when you ask questions, shake the person, or rub the person's breastbone with your knuckles.

If you're not sure if it's an overdose, go ahead and give naloxone. It won't do any harm.

Give the medicine first.

And then call 911 or have someone else call while you're giving the medicine.

It's important to give the medicine first because every second matters.

Next, start rescue breathing.

There are a few ways to give the medicine— with a nose spray, or with a needle or syringe.

Now, not every naloxone kit looks the same.

So be sure to follow the instructions you received with your kit.

And it's a good idea to review the instructions now so that you'll already know how to use the kit in an actual emergency.

Nose sprays come in two kinds—one that you put together, and one that's ready to use.

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The one that you put together works like this.

Take the yellow caps off the ends of the plastic applicator.

Then take the red or purple cap off the medicine cartridge.

Put the two open ends together, and gently twist.

Then twist the nose piece on top.

Give half the medicine in one side of the nose and half in the other.

The other kind of nose spray— the kind you don't have to put together—works like this.

Put it into one side of the nose, and give a quick, firm push.

Then wait 2 to 3 minutes to see if you need to give the second dose— in the other side of the nose.

If you're giving naloxone with a syringe, you may have to break off the top of the glass medicine tube.

Or you may just stick the needle into the bottle of medicine.

Slowly draw the medicine into the syringe.

Then firmly give the shot in either the upper arm or thigh— and through any clothes.

After you give naloxone, call 911 and stay with the person.

If a first dose doesn't work in 2 to 3 minutes, go ahead and give another dose if you have one.

If the person still isn't breathing, continue rescue breathing until the ambulance arrives.

You'll want medical help because naloxone can wear off in 30 minutes and it can send a person into withdrawal.

If the person is breathing, roll the person onto their left side with their right knee bent and their left arm above their head.

That's the easiest way to breathe.

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You may never need a naloxone kit.

But being confident about what to do— in a situation that can be quite scary—can make all the difference.