

Reducing Drug Overdose Fatalities Among Construction Workers

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) [Occupational Safety and Health Surveillance \(PennOSHS\) program](#) analyzed 2017-2021 death records and found **drug overdoses¹ were the leading cause of death for PA construction workers** ages 25-64 years. In construction workers 25-44 years, **overdoses contributed to 50% of all deaths**. Compared to other industries, overdose deaths were highest among PA construction workers, which mirrors [national trends](#). Opioids are the principal driver of overdose mortality nationally ([in 2023, nearly 76% of overdose deaths involved an opioid](#)), and multiple studies² identify construction as having the highest rates of opioid-involved overdose death. Knowing the risks of opioid use, recognizing the signs of an overdose, and being prepared with [lifesaving resources](#) will help protect PA construction workers.

WHY OVERDOSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE MATTER

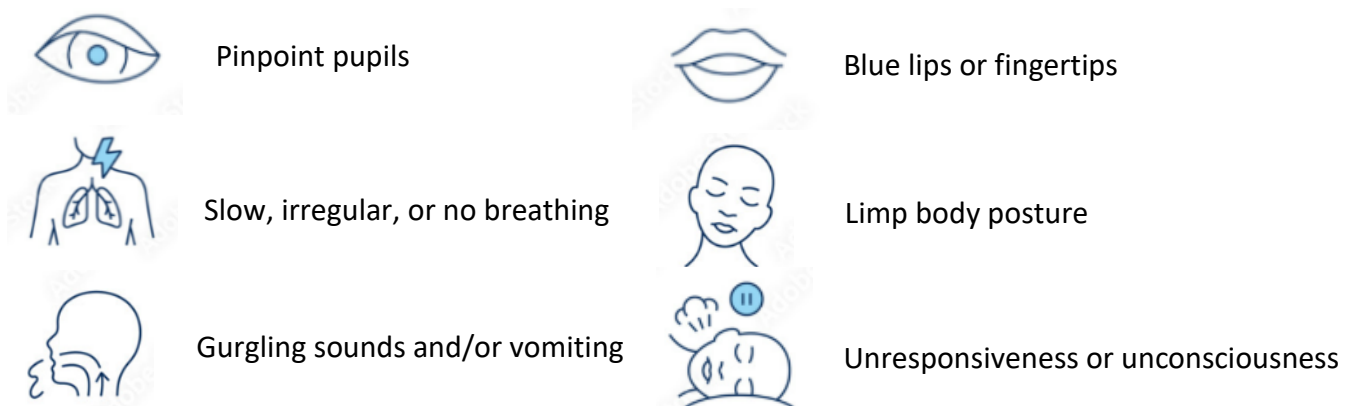
It is estimated that [1 in 10 construction workers are prescribed opioids](#). This is likely due to the physical demands of jobs in the construction industry and that there are few alternatives to opioids for pain management. Drug overdose deaths are preventable through access to treatment and prevention tools. Knowing how to respond to an overdose and having naloxone available can save lives.

WHAT IS NALOXONE?

Naloxone (often known by the brand name Narcan™) is a simple nasal spray that can quickly restore breathing during an opioid overdose. [Naloxone](#) is safe, easy to use, and has no effect if opioids are not present so anyone can give it without risk of harm. Having naloxone on-hand [can save a coworker, friend, or family member's life](#). However, many overdose deaths happen because people do not know how easy naloxone is to get or how simple it is to use. Learn more about where to get naloxone and other support under the **“What Employers Can Do”** section.

HOW TO SPOT AN OVERDOSE AND REACT ON A JOB SITE

Employers and employees that can spot the signs of an overdose and act quickly may be able to implement life-saving measures. Physical symptoms of a drug overdose, or warning signs that an overdose may occur include:





HOW TO RESPOND TO AN OVERDOSE ON A JOB SITE

When an overdose occurs on a job site, the [following actions are recommended](#):

1. Call 911 immediately
2. Administer naloxone (naloxone can be administered by anyone)
3. Perform rescue breathing if the person is not breathing
4. If the person is breathing, lay the person on their side in the recovery position
5. Stay with the person until a medical professional arrives

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

Construction industry employers should recognize the use of opioids among workers as a common occurrence and offer resources to their employees to protect them from potential addiction and overdose. These resources can be lifesaving, and may include the following:

- Educate workers on the risks of opioid use and how to spot an overdose on a job site
- Provide workers with information on how to get no-cost naloxone from the [Pennsylvania Overdose Prevention Program](#)
- Provide mental health resources to employees, visit the PA DOH [Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder webpage](#) for more information
- Provide workers with additional overdose prevention and naloxone resources from the [PA DOH naloxone webpages](#)
- Have prevention tools such as naloxone readily available and train workers on its use
- Consider a [workplace Naloxone use program](#) and implement injury-prevention programs to reduce opioid prescribing needs among your employees

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about protecting workers from opioid overdoses, please contact the Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology at the PA DOH by calling 717-787-3350 or emailing us at dehe@pa.gov.

¹ Unintentional drug overdose deaths were defined as those with an ICD-10 underlying cause-of-death code X40–X44; deaths due to intentional self-poisoning, assault (homicide), or undetermined intent were excluded.

² [Harduar Morano et al., 2018 \(Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report\)](#); [Hawkins et al., 2019 \(American Journal of Industrial Medicine\)](#); [Kaki & Hawkins, 2024 \(Annals of Work Exposures and Health\)](#).