



Understanding Drug Overdose: Staying Safe

An overdose happens when someone takes too much of a drug. This can make the body and brain stop working right. For some drugs called opioids, a person might stop breathing. This can be very dangerous and even cause death. Knowing how to stay safe and respond to overdose can save lives.

What Makes Overdose More Likely?

- **Changing Drug Use:** Taking more drugs after not using them for a while
- **Stronger Drugs:** Using a more powerful drug by mistake
- **Unknown Drugs:** Drugs from unknown sources may contain unidentified and harmful substances
- **Health Problems:** Some health conditions can make overdose more likely and severe
- **Mixing Drugs:** Using different drugs together
- **Using Drugs When Alone:** Being without anyone nearby for assistance in the event of an overdose also increases the risk

How Can You Stay Safe?

- Lower your risk by taking it slow and using less. Use clean supplies when possible.
- Know your own risks. Things that make drug use unsafe are different for each person.
- Use test strips to test your supply for other substances.
- Mixing drugs with other drugs and alcohol can be unpredictable and dangerous.
- If possible, do not use drugs by yourself.
- Keep naloxone nearby. This can help reverse an overdose.

Signs of a Possible Opioid Overdose

- Unconscious or cannot wake up
- Slow, shallow breathing or not breathing at all
- Choking, gurgling, or snoring noises
- Very small “pinpoint” pupils
- Blue or gray skin, fingernails, or lips
- Limp body (sometimes rigid with fentanyl use)

What to Do in an Emergency

- 1 Give the person a dose of naloxone if breathing has stopped.
- 2 Call 911 right away.
- 3 If they are breathing, put them on their side.
- 4 If not breathing, help them breathe. Tilt their head back, pinch their nose, and give one breath every 5 seconds.
- 5 The goal is to get the person breathing even if they do not wake up. If they do not start **breathing** after 2–3 minutes, give them another dose of naloxone.
- 6 Stay with them until help comes.

Need Help?

Call Pennsylvania’s Get Help Now Hotline:
1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Text Get Help Now: 717-216-0905

Search online: ATLAS (treatmentatlas.org)