

Opioid Overdose Rescue with Reversal Medications

Opioids are a class of natural, semi-synthetic, and synthetic drugs that include both prescription medications and illicit drugs, including kratom and 7-OH. Prescription opioids are commonly used to treat pain and can be addictive. Opioid overdose in the workplace can be a serious health and safety issue. Managers, supervisors, and employees should know what to do if someone experiences an overdose at work. Training and education can prepare workers and the community on how to prepare and respond to opioids in the workplace. Having opioid overdose reversal medications (OORMs) on hand can save lives.

How Opioid Overdose Reversal Medications (OORMs) Work

When someone takes more opioids than their body can handle, their breathing can slow down and stop. OORMs can help while waiting for paramedics to arrive.

OORMs are generally safe and effective when used as directed. These medications attach to receptors in the brain to reverse and block the effects of opioids, allowing for normal breathing to resume. They only work if someone has opioids in their system and will generally have no effect on someone who has not taken opioids.

The two FDA-approved OORMs are naloxone and nalmefene, sold under several brand names. Some naloxone sprays are available without a prescription at pharmacies and other retail outlets. Other naloxone and nalmefene products require a prescription. OORMs are available in two forms:

- **Nasal Sprays.** Nasal sprays are the most common form of OORMs. They are easier to use because they do not require needles or special training.
- **Injectables** (vials or prefilled syringes). Injections are more often used by first responders and healthcare workers, but certain forms can be used by untrained personnel as well. The medication can be given through a vein, into a muscle, or under the skin.

Employers should inform their employees which OORM is available at their workplace and ensure they are familiar with how to use that form.

OORMs work quickly but are temporary. **It's important to call 911** if you administer these medications to anyone. It may be necessary to administer an additional dose if the medication wears off while waiting for emergency responders.

How Employers Can Acquire OORMs

There are several ways that employers can get naloxone for their workplace.

- **Pharmacy.** FDA-approved nonprescription naloxone nasal spray products can be purchased without a prescription from pharmacies and other retail or online outlets. Other naloxone products remain prescription-only and may be available through state-specific mechanisms.
- **Wholesale/Bulk Purchasing.** Employers can work with wholesale pharmaceutical distributors for bulk orders.
- **Standing Orders.** Many states have standing orders that allow pharmacies to dispense prescription naloxone in bulk.
- **Group Purchasing Organizations (GPOs).** Some group purchasing organizations may offer naloxone at discounted rates for businesses.
- **Manufacturer Programs.** Some manufacturers offer special programs for employers.
- **Public Health Partnerships.** Many local and state health departments distribute naloxone at low or no cost. Employers can partner with their local health department for supply.

Maintaining OORMs in the Workplace

- **Storage.** Follow the storage conditions specified in the product labeling and keep away from direct light and excessive heat. Do not freeze this medication.
- **Managing Your Supply.** Keep track of expiration dates in the product labeling. Assign someone, such as a safety officer, to manage the supply. This helps to ensure the medicine is stored and restocked correctly.
- **Placement.** Keep naloxone in visible, easy to reach locations, such as with automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and first aid kits. Larger workplaces may want to keep multiple kits in different areas. Clear signs can also help people quickly find the medicine in an emergency.

Key Training Topics for Employees

As more employers keep these medications on hand, it is important that everyone understands how OORMs work. Consider creating a voluntary training program that covers:

- **The importance of calling 911 even if the person regains consciousness.** Naloxone is not a replacement for emergency medical care.
- **Recognizing the signs of an opioid overdose.** These may include slow or stopped breathing, blue lips, unresponsiveness, and pinpoint pupils. A gurgling or snoring sound is a red flag that the individual is at risk, as is stupor, cold and clammy skin, coma, or respiratory failure.
- **How OORMs work.**
- **Step-by-step instructions on how to use OORMs.**
- **The potential need for additional doses.** More than one dose may be needed. Follow the dosage and administration instructions in the product labeling.
- **Withdrawal symptoms.** In people who are dependent on opioids, withdrawal symptoms, such as shaking, sweating, nausea, or feeling angry, may occur after OORM use. This is to be expected.
- **The recovery position.** How to position someone safely while waiting for emergency services to arrive.
- **Good Samaritan laws.** These are laws that protect people who help someone during an overdose. Employees should know what protections exist in their state.
- **Treating people with respect.** Employees should approach overdose situations with care and professionalism.
- **Linking people who experience overdose to ongoing care.** Getting connected to treatment and ongoing support after an overdose can help people get on a path to recovery and reduce the chance of another overdose.

Resources for Employers and Employees

There are many resources to help employers and employees learn more about opioids and medicines that reverse an opioid overdose including:

- **Center for Disease Control (CDC):** Provides information on [stopping overdoses](#) and how naloxone can be lifesaving.
- **Food and Drug Administration (FDA):** Provides information on [Opioid Overdose Reversal Drugs](#).
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS):** Provides information on [how to respond to an opioid overdose](#) and connects readers to FDA OORM information, CDC Lifesaving Naloxone, SAMHSA's toolkit, naloxone/ nalmefene information, and treatment resources.
- **Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):** Provides information for [workers in the healthcare sector](#) who may be exposed to opioids.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):** Offers free guides on opioid overdose prevention and naloxone use. The [Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit](#) is a key resource. Visit www.samhsa.gov/ to learn more.
- **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH):** Provides [employer-specific resources](#) on opioid and overdose response. Visit www.cdc.gov/niosh/substance-use/opioids-and-work/index.html for more information.
- **National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS):** Provides an [awareness level training course](#) for workers, training instructors, leadership, and employers who may need to prevent and respond to opioids in the workplace.
- **State and Local Health Departments:** Many offer free in-person or virtual training for employers and employees.
- **National Safety Council (NSC):** Offers opioid workplace training programs tailored to employers. Visit www.nsc.org/community-safety/safety-topics/opioids/prescription-drug-misuse#/ to learn more.

References

- [Opioid Overdose Reversal Medications](#) (SAMHSA)
- [Information about Naloxone and Nalmefene](#) (U.S. FDA)
- [Opioids & Substance Use: Workplace Prevention & Response](#) (NIEHS)
- [Substance Use and Work](#) (NIOSH)
- [Recovery-ready Workplace Toolkit](#) (U.S. DOL)
- [How Naloxone reverses opioid overdoses \(and why it's important to have on hand!\)](#) (NIH National Medline Plus Magazine)

How to Contact OSHA

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, employers are responsible (www.osha.gov/workers/employer-responsibilities) for providing a safe and healthy workplace and workers have rights (www.osha.gov/workers). OSHA can help answer questions or concerns from employers and workers. OSHA's On-Site Consultation Program (www.osha.gov/consultation) offers free and confidential advice to small and medium-sized businesses, with priority given to high-hazard worksites. For more information, contact your regional or area OSHA office (www.osha.gov/contactus/bystate), call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), or visit www.osha.gov.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999.

