



Frequently asked questions about naloxone: After the Overdose

What are the long-term problems that can happen after an opioid poisoning is reversed by naloxone?

The goal of naloxone is to reverse the overdose before there is any permanent brain damage. In many cases, an opioid overdose can be successfully reversed with no harm to the individual. However, we know there is an increased risk of permanent disability and death in the year following even a successfully reversed overdose (Olfson et al., 2018). In one study, the estimation of all-cause mortality was 13 times higher in individuals who had experienced an opioid overdose (Ashburn et al., 2020). Factors including HIV, hepatitis, respiratory and circulation health as well as substance use contributed to the increased mortality (Olfson et al., 2018). In a recent Canadian analysis, individuals who visited the emergency department due to an overdose had a mortality hazard 3.5 times higher than those who were at the emergency department for reasons unrelated to overdose (Moe J et al., 2021). In this same analysis the mortality hazard was 7.1 times higher if the individual left the emergency department against medical advice (Moe J et al., 2021).

How do people feel after being involved in an opioid overdose situation?

Individuals who work with people who use drugs have described the act of administering naloxone to be associated with anxiety, trauma and stress (Brooker & Farrah, 2019; Shearer et al., 2019). There are reports of both positive and negative experiences post naloxone administration including: relief, confidence, disappointment and verbal/physical abuse from the victim (McAuley et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2014). First responders and emergency personnel also report emotional toll, burnout, exhaustion and helplessness associated with opioid overdoses (Saunders et al., 2019).

It's important to discuss trauma and stress during naloxone training to increase awareness. Normalizing the value of debriefing and providing resources like local grief/support groups and counseling can help patients address the emotions caused from an overdose situation (*BC Overdose Prevention Services Guide*, 2019).