

Chapter 6

In the Event of an Overdose



Recognize an overdose.

The person experiencing an overdose will be unresponsive and either not breathing or taking very slow and shallow breaths, their skin – lips and fingertips – may be turning blue or greyish, and they will have pinpoint pupils.

SIGNS OF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

- ✓ Blue lips or nails
- ✓ Dizziness and confusion
- ✓ Can't be woken up
- ✓ Choking, gurgling or snoring sounds
- ✓ Slow, weak or no breathing
- ✓ Drowsiness or difficulty staying awake

WHAT TO DO IN THE CASE OF AN OVERDOSE

The recommendations below are taken from harm reduction approaches to treatment in an effort to reduce the harm inflicted by substance use in the event that you cannot prevent it.

1. Call 911 and explain that someone is not breathing and is unresponsive. It's not necessary to mention a possible overdose at this time, though you will want to mention it when the ambulance arrives.

2. Wake them up by yelling their name, rubbing your knuckles into their chest plate or upper lip, or pinching the back of their arm. Say something they might not want to hear like "I'm going to call 911".

3. Administer Naloxone or Narcan as soon as possible if you have it. If the first dose is ineffective, administer again three minutes later. Many prevention and harm reduction programs offer regular, free training on how to administer these life-saving medicines and sometimes the actual medicine for no cost. Even if the medication is effective, a trip to the hospital is still in order.

4. Provide rescue breathing until an ambulance arrives.

5. Roll them onto their side in a rescue position if they begin to breathe on their own. That looks like laying their bottom arm out straight to rest their head, leaving their bottom leg straight and bending the top leg to rest the body weight on. This will prevent them from choking.

6. Be gentle with yourself and them. This is a stressful situation for both of you. Remember that a few deep breaths won't change what's happening, but it can give your nervous system a bit of space to remain calm and focused during a crisis.