



OPIOID AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

BE AWARE **BE PREPARED**

Understanding an Opioid Emergency

WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?

Prescription opioids are a class of powerful medications, prescribed by a healthcare provider to treat pain. While used for legitimate medical needs – including short- or sometimes long-term pain control, cough suppression, or to control severe diarrhea – prescription opioids are also sometimes used inappropriately for non-medical use.



In addition to prescribed opioids, there are also illegal opioid formulations. Although all formulations pose the risk for dependence or abuse, they do so to different degrees. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) schedules opioids according to their acceptable medical use and potential for abuse or dependency.

It's important to understand that prescription opioids can be helpful to manage chronic pain, but they come with risks even when used appropriately. When used too frequently, inappropriately, or without a prescription, they can cause serious life-threatening effects.

COMMON OPIOIDS



Recognizing which medicines are opioids is an important step to prevent opioid overuse emergencies! Frequently prescribed and common opioids include:

View full list of brand and generic opioids available in the U.S. at [BeAwareBePrepared.com](https://www.BeAwareBePrepared.com).

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Generic Name	Trade Names*
Fentanyl	Actiq®, Duragesic®, Fentora®, Abstral®, Onsolis®
Hydrocodone	Hysingla® ER, Zohydro® ER
Hydrocodone/Acetaminophen	Lorcet®, Lortab®, Norco®, Vicodin®
Hydromorphone	Dilaudid®, Exalgo®
Meperidine	Demerol®
Methadone	Dolophine®, Methadose™
Morphine	Kadian®, MS Contin®, Morphabond™
Oxycodone	OxyContin®, Oxaydo®
Oxycodone and Acetaminophen	Percocet®, Roxicet®

HOW DO OPIOIDS WORK?

Opioids attach to receptors in the brain, spinal cord, and gut. This produces a range of effects that include the release of chemical messengers to the brain, resulting in pain relief.

In addition to relieving pain, opioids can also cause life-threatening side effects, which include:

- Slowed or shallow breathing
- Weak pulse
- Low blood pressure

These effects can start as quickly as 5 to 10 minutes after taking an opioid and, depending on whether opioids are taken by mouth, via a skin patch, or by injection, can peak within 30 minutes to an hour.

Did you know that **~83%** of prescription opioid-related deaths are **unintended/accidental?**



WHO'S TAKING OPIOIDS AND WHY?

- Opioids are commonly prescribed for acute, transient (i.e., short-term) injuries
- Opioids are also often prescribed for patients suffering from chronic, long-term pain
- Others may have borrowed an opioid prescription from a friend or family member to self-treat their pain
- Although many patients find themselves relying on opioid medications for pain relief, some grow dependent on them even though their underlying pain has gone away
- The use of opioids without a prescription is considered "illicit use," and may include "street drugs" like heroin, fentanyl, and carfentanil, all of which are significantly more potent than prescription-grade agents. Help is available for people who believe that they are dependent on opioids.



Within 1 month of daily use, opioids can start to change the ability of the brain to function normally.

WHO'S AT RISK FOR AN OPIOID OVERDOSE EMERGENCY?

There are many reasons for opioid overdose emergencies and most often, they are accidental and unintentional. In fact, opioid overdose emergencies can even occur when opioids are used as directed.

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** states that "people dependent on opioids are most likely to suffer an overdose."

Those at highest risk:

- Take high doses of opioids
- Consume certain other sedating medications or alcohol
- Have a history of substance abuse
- Have children, other family, friends, and loved ones who have access to unlocked or unsecured prescription opioids

For example:

- Do you have a senior partner (65+) who is taking multiple medications, including sedatives or muscle relaxants, that can interact with opioids?
- Has a loved one recently served time in prison and gone through forced treatment withdrawal?
- Do you have children with ready access to the medicine cabinet?
- Do you have a sibling with a mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety?

The bottom line is that anyone who uses opioids for pain control or for recreational purposes is at risk for an opioid emergency, and any household that has opioids may be at risk. **Knowing the risks and who's at risk, along with the steps to take in the event of an emergency, may mean the difference between life and death.** The likeliness of fatal overdose in children under 10 is more than doubled (~2.5 times) when an opioid is in their home.

HOW DOES AN OPIOID EMERGENCY OCCUR?



An opioid overdose emergency occurs when there are so many opioid molecules in the brain that they overwhelm the brain receptors and block the body's drive to breathe.

KNOW THE SIGNS OF AN OPIOID EMERGENCY

The following signs and symptoms may indicate an opioid overdose emergency:



UNUSUAL SLEEPINESS OR
NOT ABLE TO AWAKEN



BREATHING WILL BE
SLOW OR ABSENT



SLOW HEARTBEAT OR
LOW BLOOD PRESSURE



SKIN FEELS COLD
AND CLAMMY



PUPILS ARE TINY



NAILS AND LIPS
ARE BLUE

**IN CASE OF
EMERGENCY,
CALL 9-1-1**

IF YOU SUSPECT AN OPIOID OVERDOSE, CALL 911 FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY.

OPIOID EMERGENCY TREATMENT OPTIONS

Opioid emergency-related deaths can often be prevented if a person receives emergency medical care and timely administration of an opioid overdose emergency treatment. **Every second counts.**

For years, treatments that quickly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose and help restore breathing have only been available in medical and hospital settings for use by trained personnel. However, consumers are able to purchase **FDA-approved emergency treatments directly from the pharmacy**, and many insurance plans cover them at a relatively low cost. **Their role as an overdose reversal agent is critical.**

OPIOID EMERGENCY TREATMENT OPTIONS

Provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that approximately **67,000** opioid overdose deaths occurred in the US in a 12-month period ending in Nov 2020. The CDC recommends the following:

- Individuals who are at risk for opioid overdose – including those with a prior history of overdose, those with opioid use disorder, or those using illicit opioids and other drugs that might be mixed with fentanyl – get a prescription for naloxone from their healthcare provider
- Those who take high doses of prescription opioids or who have both opioid and benzodiazepine prescriptions also get a prescription for naloxone
- Multiple doses of naloxone may be administered for a single overdose, as needed, due to the potency of fentanyl or the prolonged effects of opioids

This is not a substitute for emergency medical care. When administering an emergency treatment option, always be sure to call 911 right away, even if the person wakes up. Rescue breathing or CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) may be given while waiting for emergency medical help to arrive.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information, visit:

[BeAwareBePrepared.com](https://www.BeAwareBePrepared.com)

[SAMHSA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\) Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit](#)

[SAMHSA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\) Opioid Prevention App \(IOS Only\)](#)

[SAMHSA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\) Endorsed OpiRescue Overdose Support Tool](#)

[CDC \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\) Opioid Overdose Tip Card](#)

[CDC \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\) Patient Fact Sheet: Promoting Safer and More Effective Pain Management](#)

[CDC \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\) Prescription Opioids: What You Need to Know](#)

[CDC \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\) Pregnancy and Opioid Pain Medications](#)

[JAMA \(Journal of the American Medical Association\) Patient Resource: Opioids for Chronic Pain](#)

[World Health Organization. Management of substance abuse: Information sheet on opioid overdose](#)