

Using any drug can be risky. This is true of drugs that are sold over the counter, like aspirin, prescription medications like antibiotics, or unregulated drugs like heroin or methamphetamine.

People who drive cars can reduce their risk of injury by wearing seatbelts. People who spend time outdoors reduce their risk of injury by wearing sunscreen. People who use aspirin or antibiotics can reduce the risk of side effects by taking these medications with food.

The risk reduction strategies here are similar and shared with the goal of keeping people safe and reducing the risk of overdose death for all Kentuckians.

OPIOID OVERDOSE RISK REDUCTION

for people who:

USE PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS

- Carry naloxone, the drug used to reverse opioid overdose.
- Take opioid medications only as directed.
 - Take the amount prescribed at the times prescribed.
 - If you are taking opioid medication in any other way, see "Opioid Overdose Risk Reduction for people who use unregulated opioids."
- Take only your medication.
 - Any opioid medication not obtained from a pharmacy may be counterfeit and could contain fentanyl or other unregulated substances. See "Opioid Overdose Risk Reduction for people who use unregulated opioids."
- See your healthcare providers regularly.
 - Make sure that each provider you visit has a current copy of your full medication list.
- Using opioids with any of the following can increase the risk of overdose:
 - alcohol
 - benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium, Klonopin)
 - any other opioids
 - cocaine
 - sleeping pills
 - methamphetamine
 - gabapentin (Neurontin)
- Monitor closely conditions that increase risk for overdose, such as decreased liver or kidney function.
- Dispose of any unused opioid medications properly.

MAY RESPOND TO AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

- Carry naloxone, the drug used to reverse opioid overdose.
 - Rapid administration is key to reversing an overdose.
 - If someone who received naloxone is breathing slowly, shallowly, or not at all rescue breathing is essential.
- **Fentanyl can be deadly to people who use drugs.**
 - Although fentanyl is extremely potent opioid, it must be directly ingested to cause an overdose.
 - overdose occurs when people swallow, smoke, snort or inject fentanyl.
- **Fentanyl is extremely unlikely to harm people who do not use drugs.**
 - Powdered fentanyl does not remain suspended in the air and does not easily absorb through the skin.
 - The American College of Medical Toxicology (AMCT) and American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT) state that "the risk of clinically significant exposure to emergency responders is extremely low."
 - Regular nitrile gloves, eye protection, and a disposable N95 mask are sufficient protection when responding to an overdose.
 - A CPR barrier mask is sufficient protection when providing rescue breathing.



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Kentucky Public Health

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Harm Reduction

Created February 2024

OPIOID OVERDOSE RISK REDUCTION

for people who:

USE UNREGULATED (ILLICIT) OPIOIDS

- Carry naloxone, the drug used to reverse opioid overdose.
- Never use unregulated opioids alone.
 - If you are using opioids, try to have someone there with you
 - who is not using the same thing at the same time,
 - who has naloxone, knows how to use it, and can administer it if needed.
- If no one is available, call the Never Use Alone number for support: 1-800-696-1996.
- Keep in mind that unregulated drugs can vary in potency.
 - Counterfeit pills and products sold as heroin often contain fentanyl in inconsistent quantities. It can be very difficult to know what you are getting and how strong it is.
 - Use fentanyl test strips.
- Start with the lowest dose. Go slowly.
- Try to wait between using different types of drugs.
- If using again after taking a break, use smaller amounts with extra caution.
 - If you have recently gone through opioid withdrawal, your tolerance for opioids is decreased. You can overdose very easily.
 - If you have recently been in treatment, recovery or have been recently incarcerated, you are especially at risk.



USE ANY UNREGULATED (ILLICIT) DRUGS

- Carry naloxone, the drug used to reverse opioid overdose.
 - Tell someone where it is and how to use it.
- If you are using unregulated drugs, you may be using fentanyl.
 - Fentanyl may be added to counterfeit pills that look like Xanax, Percocet, or generic oxycodone with the Stamp M-30.
 - Fentanyl is sometime found in other unregulated drugs such as cocaine or methamphetamine.
 - Overdose can occur by any route: swallowing, smoking, snorting, or injecting.
 - Use fentanyl test strips.
- Your risk for overdose is extremely high if you use opioids accidentally.
 - If you do not use opioids regularly, even small amounts can cause an overdose.
 - If you become unresponsive, it may not be obvious that an opioid overdose is occurring. This could delay the administration of naloxone.

