Frequently Asked Questions

Naloxone safety

What if the person is not even overdosing and I give them Naloxone? Will it hurt them?
Naloxone has no effect on someone who has no opioids in their system. It will not help anyone who is not in an OD, but it will not hurt them either.

Can someone overdose on Naloxone or what if I give too much Naloxone?
It is not possible to give so much naloxone so as to harm a person. However, if a person is dependent on opioids (including people without substance use disorders, but on chronic pain medication) or has a habit, the more naloxone they get, the more uncomfortable they will be because of withdrawal symptoms. Vomiting is a possibility- be sure they don’t aspirate (inhale) the vomit – that is very dangerous. If the person gets too much naloxone, try to explain to them that the withdrawals or “dopesickness” will begin to fade in a half hour or so.

What if someone overdosing is pregnant?
Withdrawal is not healthy for a developing fetus but having a mother who is not getting enough oxygen or dying is far worse. Just be sure she really needs it (sternal rub) and call 911.

What if my kids (or small children in area where Naloxone rescue kit is kept) find and use the Naloxone can it hurt them?
Naloxone acts as an opiate antagonist and has no adverse effects – it simply kicks opiates off brain receptors temporarily to reverse an overdose. While the medication itself does not pose a real risk to small children, it’s important to keep in mind the risks associated with the devices. The small parts may pose a choking hazard, the Amphastar vial is made of very thin glass which can be easily broken, and there is a sharp needle inside the plastic tubing of the applicator. It is a good idea to keep this and other medicines out of reach of children.

My Naloxone expired- what should I do?
Get a new kit! If it is the only thing you have, use it. Naloxone may start to lose its effectiveness after its expiration date. However, is probably strong enough to reverse an overdose.

What if the naloxone gets hot or freezes, will it still work?
If not properly stored naloxone may become weaker but this is a slow process. It should still work.
Can you develop immunity or tolerance to Naloxone?
No, people will not develop tolerance to naloxone- it can be used as effectively on the first overdose as on the 8th overdose, for example.

Naloxone makes people violent, right?
Naloxone/naloxone itself does not evoke ‘violent’ reactions in folks – but people may be in withdrawal and/or confused. The person may feel better if they are told that the naloxone will begin to fade after about 30 minutes. Even if angry at the time, some may thank you later.

What if someone injects the Amphastar product?
It is probably a higher dose of naloxone than therapeutically necessary and the person would probably experience more severe withdrawal symptoms. However, it would work to reverse an OD.

What happens if the MAD nasal adapter gets lost?
Two things have been done successfully (but should only be done in an emergency): Inject the naloxone in the vial; or squirt it up the person’s nose anyway without the nasal adapter.

What is the risk period for an OD to reoccur after giving Naloxone?
Naloxone is active for about 30 – 90 minutes in the body. So if you give someone naloxone to reverse an opioid overdose, the naloxone may wear off before the opiates wear off and the person could go into overdose mode again. Someone may want to use opioids again right away if they are in withdrawal. It is very important that they do not use again for a couple of hours. Ideally people should receive medical attention but if they are able to speak clearly and walk after the naloxone they will PROBABLY be ok. If not, they must get medical attention.

Other drugs
Will Naloxone work on an alcohol OD?
Naloxone will not work on an alcohol overdose, only opiate overdoses. If it is an alcohol overdose that also involves opiates, it might help by restoring respiration.

Can I give them a shot of coke or speed OR does speedballing balance you out?
No- stimulants do not cancel out OD risk- it actually increases risk, especially cocaine which can also numb the urge to breathe. Speedballing is any combination of a stimulant (upper) and a depressant (downer) taken together, especially a mixture of heroin and cocaine or heroin and methamphetamine injected into the bloodstream. The more different drugs someone’s body has to process, the harder it is on their body.
What if it is a crack/coke OD?
Naloxone will not work on a cocaine overdose, only opiate overdoses. Cocaine overdoses (or poisoning) can cause chest pain, seizures, hyperthermia and hyperactivity. Cocaine overdoses are dangerous; they are a complicated medical emergency- call 911.

What about Fentanyl and ODs?
Fentanyl is an extremely concentrated/potent opiate and is sometimes made in illegal labs. Sometimes fentanyl is mixed with heroin in order to increase potency or compensate for low-quality heroin. If it is not well mixed a small bit of highly potent fentanyl could cause an OD in a user that is expecting just heroin. Fentanyl patches designed to treat pain for people who are already dependent on opioids for pain management, are sometimes misused. Fentanyl is extremely potent; higher doses of naloxone may be required.

Common beliefs
What about salt shots?
Many people who use heroin believe one can prevent an overdose from becoming fatal by giving an IV injection of salt. This may cause pain so if the person CAN respond to pain, it appears to work in the same way as a sternal rub. Fixing a salt shot wastes precious time that could be spent on calling 911, rescue breathing & giving naloxone.

Will hitting someone bring them out of an OD?
You really do not want to kick, slap, punch, drag anyone...you might hurt them. The sternal rub basically does the same thing as hitting, but we want to cause pain but without causing harm. If someone doesn’t respond to a sternal rub, move on! Call 911, and give naloxone.

What about ice or cold showers?
Ice down the pants or a cold shower might work and it might not. Ice down the pants or cold showers can slow down the respiratory system and can send someone into shock or hypothermia.
A safer, quicker, more likely to work action is: Call 911 and give naloxone.

Naloxone- is that stuff that you stick through the heart, like in that movie Pulp Fiction, right?
No, while naloxone does have an injectable form, it is never injected into the heart. The injectable form of naloxone is injected either intravenous or intramuscularly.
Other questions
Will using Naloxone help someone pass a drug test?
No. Naloxone knocks opiates off the opiate receptors, but the drug is still floating around in the body (AND urine!)

Can someone get arrested for being at an OD?
The New York State Good Samaritan law offers protection against prosecution for some drug possession, underage drinking, paraphernalia and sharing drugs (which is normally considered to be sales). This reduces the risk of arrest.

Shouldn’t people just go into treatment?
Of course! But it isn’t always easy to do and they need to be alive to get there. Treatment with methadone or buprenorphine (Suboxone®) maintenance is very powerful at preventing overdoses from happening in the first place

If we help people avoid overdoses, how will they ever learn how dangerous drug use is/hit “rock bottom”/ get a “wake up call”?
The death of a friend or a near death experience does not “teach” drug users a “lesson”. Increased psychological distress or trauma can actually increase substance use.