

SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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UNDERSTANDING OPIOIDS: AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

OBJECTIVE To recognize the signs of opioid overdose and to know the actions that can help to stop an event from occurring.

WHAT IS THE OPIOID CRISIS?

Prescription drug misuse and abuse are issues that touch people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and ages, and the statistics are staggering. Raising awareness about opioid overdose can help reduce the stigma surrounding drug-related deaths and acknowledge the grief felt by families and friends. Commonly used opioids include oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, codeine, heroin, fentanyl, methadone, and opium. Illegally made fentanyl is especially concerning because it is highly potent and may be mixed into other drugs or pressed into counterfeit pills without a person's knowledge. This can lead to an unexpected overdose.

PRESCRIPTION OPIOID MISUSE

Taking prescription pain medications can have serious consequences, including:

- Allergic reactions
- Breathing problems
- Coma
- Permanent brain damage
- Death



**Opioid
Awareness**



SOCIAL MEDIA & OPIOID ABUSE

With the growth of social media and the proliferation of smartphones, a dangerous and deadly new drug threat has emerged:

Criminal drug networks are abusing social media to expand their reach, create new markets, and target new clientele.

Criminal organizations, including drug traffickers, have noticed and are using emojis to buy and sell counterfeit pills and other illicit drugs on social media. This includes selling deadly fake fentanyl and methamphetamine pills, often to unsuspecting teenagers and young adults, who think they are buying the real thing. No longer confined to street corners and the dark web.



SIGNS OF OVERDOSE

Opioids dull the senses and induce relaxation and euphoria. They depress (slow down) breathing and the heart rate. In high doses, opioids depress the body's natural urge to breathe. When someone is having an overdose, they can stop breathing and may die. Even if a person does not die from an overdose, they can sustain brain damage. Signs of overdose include:

- No response to stimuli
- Shallow/stopped breathing
- Can't be woken up
- Unusual snoring/gurgling sounds
- Blue/grey lips or fingertips
- Floppy arms and legs

If you cannot get a response from someone, do not assume they are asleep. Unusual or deep snoring is a common sign of overdose. Do not let people at risk 'sleep it off'. If the person does not respond to sound or pain, then it is a medical emergency; **immediately call 9-1-1**.

PREVENTION

Actions that schools, school districts, and Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) can take to stop an event from occurring:

- Integrate efforts to prevent an opioid overdose with other alcohol and other drug (AOD) prevention programming. For example, a school may have a comprehensive approach to AOD prevention, including efforts that are universal (targeting groups or populations), selective (targeting risk factors among high-risk groups), and indicated (targeting individuals who show signs of being at risk for a substance use disorder). The [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](https://www.nida.nih.gov/) provides more information on this topic.
- Foster a positive school/higher ed climate that discourages the use of illicit drugs and where students, staff, teachers, and faculty are comfortable seeking treatment and support options for themselves and others.





- Incorporate opioid abuse/misuse prevention strategies into health education and behavioral health programs.
- Encourage students, families, and households to dispose of unused prescription medications - which may otherwise be misused. Schools and Institutions of Higher Education can utilize resources on the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA's) [National Rx Website](#), such as Public Service Announcements for Take Back Day—a day when thousands of locations accept prescription medicine for disposal.
- More information on preventing drug abuse for schools is available [here](#), and for IHEs [here](#). For parents and guardians, ED and DOJ provide the guide [Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention](#).

NALOXONE

Naloxone (Narcan) is a medication that can quickly reverse an opioid overdose, including those involving fentanyl. Schools should consider having naloxone readily accessible, ensuring designated personnel know where it is located and how to administer it, and incorporating its use into emergency response procedures. In a suspected overdose, **call 911 immediately** and administer naloxone when available.



DISPOSAL OF UNUSED MEDICATIONS

Unneeded prescription medication—those that are old, unwanted, or no longer needed - are a public safety issue, too often becoming a gateway to addiction. Many opioid addictions start with prescription pills found in medicine cabinets at home. Pharmaceutical drugs can be just as dangerous as street drugs when taken without a prescription or a doctor's supervision. Most people who misuse a prescription medication obtained the medicine from a family member or friend. The best way to dispose of most unused or expired medicines (both prescription and over-the-counter) is to drop them off immediately at a drug take-back site, location, or program. Additional information on how to properly dispose of unused or expired Medicine can be found on the [Food and Drug Administration website](#). You can find a local drop-off location for disposal [here](#).

RESOURCES

CA Department of Public Health - Substance and Addiction Prevention Branch

www.DEAtakeback.com

DEA - www.dea.gov/onepill

<https://www.campusdrugprevention.gov/>

www.overdoseday.com

<https://opioidanalgesicrems.com/home.html>

SAMHSA's National Helpline: [1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](tel:1-800-662-HELP), or TTY: [1-800-487-4889](tel:1-800-487-4889) is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations.

This California Schools JPA Safety Matters is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.





SIGN-IN SHEET

UNDERSTANDING OPIOIDS: AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Facilitator: _____ Facilitator's Signature: _____

Date: _____ Organization: _____ Department: _____

Participants:

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