Naloxone is a non-scheduled prescription medication that can rapidly reverse an opioid overdose. When administered during an overdose, naloxone, as an opioid antagonist, binds to opioid receptors—blocking the effects of opioids on the brain and quickly restoring breathing.

Naloxone has been used safely by emergency medical professionals for more than 40 years and has only one critical function: to reverse the effects of opioids in order to prevent overdose death. Naloxone has no potential for abuse.

If naloxone is given to a person who is not experiencing an opioid overdose, it is harmless. If naloxone is administered to a person who is dependent on opioids, it will produce withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal, although uncomfortable, is not life-threatening.
There are three FDA-approved “opioid antagonist” that counters the effects of opioid (e.g., heroin, fentanyl, or prescription pain medications) overdose.

Physicians can save lives by co-prescribing naloxone when clinically appropriate. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a physician can consider co-prescribing naloxone for a patient who:

- Takes high doses of opioids for long-term chronic pain management
- Receives rotating opioid medication regimens
- Has been discharged from emergency medical care following opioid poisoning or intoxication
- Takes extended-release or long-acting opioid medications
- Is completing mandatory opioid detoxification or abstinence programs

Some forms of naloxone can be administered by laypeople who become familiar with the relatively simple process (click on ‘How to give Naloxone’ under the ‘Patient Resources’ header below).

Prescriber Resources:

- Prescribe to Prevent
- U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on Naloxone and Opioid Overdose
- 2018 HHS Guidance
- MSMS Webinar – Naloxone Prescribing
- Putting Naloxone Into Action!
- Opioid Overdose Resuscitation Card
- U.S. Food & Drug Administration Labeling Requirements
- U.S. Food & Drug Administration Recommendations

Patient Resources:

- Learn the Facts: Naloxone
- GetNaloxoneNow
- How to use Naloxone
- MDHHS Map: Pharmacies Approved to Dispense Naloxone

REFERENCES