

# OPIOIDS AT WORK

## EMPLOYER TOOLKIT



## Naloxone in the Workplace

Naloxone is a drug that can temporarily stop many of the life-threatening effects of overdoses from opioids, and can help restore breathing and reverse the sedation and unconsciousness that are common during an opioid overdose. This allows time for emergency services to arrive and treat the overdose victim. It is available as a nasal spray and in two different injections. Naloxone only affects people who are experiencing an opioid overdose.

For first responders, opioids users, and the people around them, the ability to recognize and respond to an opioid overdose with naloxone will save lives.

Workplaces can consider including naloxone in its first aid supplies and provide naloxone training to first responders.

Employers can teach their employees how to recognize the signs and symptoms of an overdose, and consider having naloxone in the workplace.

**Naloxone only affects people who are experiencing an opioid overdose, and cannot hurt the victim – it can only help.**

### SHOULD YOU HAVE A WORKPLACE NALOXONE PROGRAM?

Fatal opioid overdoses in the workplace are rising. In fact, the rate of workplace overdose fatality increased 24% annually between 2011 and 2016<sup>1</sup>.

Any opioid user – which may include employees, visitors or passersby – is at risk for an opioid overdose. Occupations with higher rates of work-related injuries and illnesses, as well as those with lower availability of paid sick leave and lower job security, have higher opioid overdose death rates. If your organization is considering implementation of a workplace naloxone program, there are several questions that must be asked to determine the feasibility of implementing a program.

#### Other Considerations

There are several questions that a workplace must address before implementing a workplace naloxone program. Some of these considerations concern legality and liability, while some address the readiness of the workforce that would be trained to administer naloxone. It is also important to consider the likelihood of an opioid overdose occurring in the workplace or on workplace grounds. Learn more about the questions that should be asked in the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health [Using Naloxone to Reverse Opioid Overdose in the Workplace](#) fact sheet.

Examining these questions can provide clarity on whether or not a workplace naloxone program is necessary. If you decide to implement a program, developing appropriate policies and procedures is key.

### ESTABLISHING A PROGRAM

Policies and procedures should be developed by a core group of representatives, including human resources, safety and health professionals, employees and a legal representative. Issues to consider:

- Liability and other legal issues
- Recording and documenting trainings and incidents while protecting the privacy of the victims
- Defining clear roles and responsibilities for potential responders to a suspected opioid overdose

Naloxone should be stored in an easily accessible location, at the temperature the manufacturer recommends, and should be replaced as soon as it expires. Personal protective equipment (breathing masks, non-latex gloves) should be stored with the naloxone for ease of response.

### Training

Contact your health care provider, a local government or community organization working on the opioid crisis, or a local police or fire department to find out where your staff can get naloxone training. Consider holding a training twice a year or once a quarter to ensure that all staff are trained.

Staff who are being trained to respond to a suspected opioid overdose must be able to:

- Assess a scene for safety concerns
- Call 911
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of an overdose
- Administer naloxone and recognize if additional doses are needed
- Use first aid, CPR and other basic life support interventions if needed
- Follow appropriate policies and procedures after the incident

If implementing a workplace naloxone program, consider providing bloodborne pathogen training as well. This training teaches how to avoid exposure to bloodborne pathogens and what to do if exposed. It is helpful to have this training whether a workplace naloxone program is present or not in case of accidental exposure to blood. If exposed to blood at the site of a suspected overdose (there may be needles, other sharps or blood present at the scene), staff should have procedures in place to ensure they get the care they need immediately.

### What to Do After an Overdose in the Workplace

For the overdose victim, the first concern is emergency care. Consider developing a plan for immediate care by professional health care providers, referral for follow-up care, and ongoing support.

If the overdose victim is an employee, there may be concerns or confusion on how to treat them when they return to work. Supervisors and/or HR can have conversations with co-workers that allow their concerns to be heard, while respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the returning employee.

For staff responders and bystanders, make sure that emergency assistance and support (i.e. ensuring access to the Employee Assistance Program, mental health services, other support services) are available if necessary – witnessing an overdose can be a traumatic event.



### Key Steps for Employers

- ✓ Assess workplace readiness for having naloxone in the workplace
- ✓ Ensure all legal and liability concerns are addressed
- ✓ Establish workplace policies and procedures on responding to an opioid overdose with naloxone (pre, during, and post overdose scenarios should be addressed)
- ✓ Get trained on how to respond to an opioid overdose with naloxone
- ✓ Obtain naloxone

### Legal Implications

Every component of the drug free workplace program must:

- Be developed in partnership with the organization's legal advisers
- Safeguard employee confidentiality
- Comply with federal, state and local regulations, including but not limited to OSHA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Mental Health Parity Act and HIPAA
- Comply with union and industry regulations

The Opioids at Work Employer Toolkit has been developed to raise awareness with businesses about how to respond to the risks associated with the misuse of opioids and other drugs. The content is meant for educational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice or replacing the work needed to develop a responsible drug-free workplace program. As such, it should not be used as a substitute for consultation with a legal professional, or other competent advisor.

*Medical advice and information in this document were approved by NSC physicians who advise the Council on our substance use harm initiatives. These doctors also are members of the [NSC Physician Speakers Bureau](#).*

<sup>1</sup> Tiesman, H. M., Konda, S., Cimineri, L., & Castillo, D. N. (2019). Drug overdose deaths at work, 2011–2016. *Injury Prevention*. doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2018-043104