Opioids are risky drugs

Always assess the patient’s medications.

- **Opioid doses greater than 50 mg/d MEQ***
  Doses above 50 mg/d double a person’s risk of overdose death, while doses greater than 200 mg/d increase the risk five-fold.

- **Long term use of opioids**
  After one month of use, a patient’s risk of overdose increases four-fold, and becomes 14 times as high for those taking opioids for more than one year.

- **Opioid dosage forms**
  Patients on long-acting opioids have a two times higher risk of opioid overdose. Use of methadone is a major risk factor, especially in the first month of treatment.

- **Concomitant use of other medications:**
  - Benzodiazepines = seven fold increased overdose risk.
  - Skeletal muscle relaxants = three fold increased risk.
  - Barbiturates and other hypnotics = three fold increased risk.
  - Antidepressants, antipsychotics, and warfarin are also associated with an increased risk.

  Use of two or more of the above in combination with opioids exponentially increases the risk of overdose.

- **Alcohol**
  Even a modest amount of alcohol significantly increases the risk of respiratory depression when combined with an opioid.

*MEQ = Morphine Equivalents. Conversion tool: [http://nationalpaincentre.mcmaster.ca/opioid/cgop_b_app_b08.html](http://nationalpaincentre.mcmaster.ca/opioid/cgop_b_app_b08.html)

References:

A thorough history is important!

Certain medical, social, and environmental questions can help identify those who would benefit most from naloxone.

- **History of overdose**
  Questions about overdose (or a “bad reaction”) can be included in information gathering.

- **Comorbidities**
  Certain conditions put patients at even higher risk, including:
  - Respiratory conditions like asthma, COPD, and sleep apnea.
  - Renal, or liver dysfunction.
  - Depression or other mental health disorders.

- **Recent discharge from prison or rehabilitation program**
  A person’s opioid tolerance is dramatically decreased after even a short period of abstinence (2-3 days).

- **Suspected illicit use of opioids or other recreational drugs**
  Testing shows that heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine are often contaminated with fentanyl.

- **Living in a remote area**
  Longer EMS response times makes naloxone more vital for preventing overdose deaths.

- **Children in the household**
  Stress the importance of having naloxone on-hand in case of accidental ingestion by children or others in their home.
Let’s Get Started!

6 ways to increase naloxone uptake and save lives in your community

1. Improve your knowledge
   Sign up for OPA’s FREE “Take-home Naloxone in Community Pharmacies” online module: www.opatoday.com/224122
   Be prepared
   Think about how to start conversations with your patients and be able to respond to inquiries before they happen.

2. Start the conversation
   Include training on risk reduction as a component in your counselling and ask about drug use and overdose risk factors.
   Think outside the pharmacy!
   Partner with organizations in your community to provide educational workshops (e.g. religious organizations, schools, community centers).
   Advertise
   Have posters and patient information available in your pharmacy to initiate conversations with your patients. The Ontario Pharmacists Association has resources to help: www.opatoday.com/professional/resources(for-pharmacists/tools-and-forms/naloxone

3. Be proactive: Offer naloxone to everyone
   Naloxone uptake is lower when patients need to approach you themselves.
   Offering kits to everyone prevents anyone from feeling singled out.
   Patients with opioid prescriptions:
   Identify and educate! Patients often don’t know that naloxone would be beneficial for them.
   Everyone else:
   Introduce naloxone as an important safety measure if they or anyone they know takes opioids.

4. Order pre-assembled kits
   More information about naloxone kits and components can be found on the OPA website here: www.opatoday.com/professional/naloxone_kit_tools

5. Make the time. You could save a life.
   Approaching a patient and educating about naloxone can take as little as 5 to 10 minutes!
   Educate the whole team
   Knowledgeable staff can streamline the process.
   Use your resource
   There are educational materials and counselling checklists to help: www.opatoday.com/professional/resources(for-pharmacists/tools-and-forms/naloxone

6. End stigma
   Stigma causes alienation and isolation.
   Fear of judgment often limits naloxone uptake.
   Become a health partner by establishing authentic relationships with patients.
   • Use empathy and active listening.
   • Emphasize confidentiality.
   Educate in a straightforward and non-judgmental manner.
   • Use accurate and simple language.
   • Include verbal and written materials.
   • Focus on the health issues associated with opioids.
   Empower your patients
   Naloxone allows people to feel more in control over their well-being.
   Show respect by having an appreciation for the life experiences of your patients.
   • Acknowledge your personal biases.
   • Avoid stigmatizing words, such as ‘narcotics’ or ‘user’.

More information about naloxone kits and components can be found on the OPA website here: www.opatoday.com/professional/naloxone_kit_tools

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The New Opioid Reality

Canada is the **second** largest per capita user of prescribed opioids.¹

More than **2,458** Canadians died of opioid overdoses in 2016

1 in 7 Ontarians received opioid medications in 2015-16, totaling 9 million prescriptions dispensed.²

Opioid Deaths in Ontario³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why Naloxone? Because it works!

**Naloxone kits dispensed**

- **96%** Opioid overdose reversal success rate when naloxone is used.⁴

- **27–46%** Decrease in opioid related deaths associated with provision of naloxone.⁴

As a pharmacist, you are accessible, trustworthy, and ideally placed to provide naloxone services.

Yet **74.5%** of OPA members surveyed didn’t dispense naloxone or dispensed less than one kit per week

The Ontario Pharmacists Association has resources to help you get started!

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