

Dispensing Naloxone to Prevent Overdose Deaths:

What New Jersey Pharmacists Need to Know

What is naloxone?

Naloxone hydrochloride (Narcan[®]) is a medication that blocks uptake of opioid drugs at receptors in the brain. By counteracting the effects of opioids on the central nervous system, naloxone reverses respiratory depression associated with fatal opioid overdose.ⁱ Naloxone is commonly given through intramuscular injection or intranasal atomization.ⁱⁱ In addition, an electronic device with an auto-injector (similar to those used for epinephrine) has recently been FDA-approved.ⁱⁱⁱ

Who administers naloxone in overdose emergencies?

Naloxone has been administered in emergency departments for decades and is increasingly being utilized by non-medical professionals serving as first responders. Along with widespread deployment by New Jersey police officers, firefighters and EMTs, naloxone is highly effective in the hands of layperson “Good Samaritans” who are often on the scene of overdoses before emergency personnel. Overdose witnesses—typically the peers, friends or loved ones of the victim—can safely and easily administer naloxone while waiting for help to arrive, restoring the victim’s breathing quickly to reduce the likelihood of brain damage and death.

Is opioid overdose a problem in New Jersey?

Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in New Jersey, surpassing even car accidents. Most overdose fatalities involve opioids such as prescription painkillers. The *Overdose Prevention Act*, signed into law by Governor Christie in May of 2013, is part of a public health strategy to avoid needless overdose deaths.

What does the *Overdose Prevention Act (OPA)* do?

This statute provides protections from civil and criminal liability to those who prescribe, dispense and administer naloxone.^{iv} It also encourages calling 911 in overdose emergencies by providing immunity from arrest and prosecution on drug possession charges to overdose victims and those who seek medical assistance.

How can New Jerseyans obtain naloxone?

Under the *OPA*, health care professionals can provide naloxone to any person who is at risk for opioid overdose or who may be in a position to help someone else who is experiencing one. Through a standing order from a physician, health care practitioners including pharmacists can dispense naloxone to any recipient they deem capable of administering it to an overdose victim in an emergency. This extends access to naloxone to people who may be in the best position to intervene quickly in an overdose emergency, including peers and family members of those struggling with addiction. The New Jersey Board of Medical Examiners issued a certificate of waiver for physicians and other prescribers to write prescriptions for naloxone in the name of the person receiving the prescription, rather than in the name of the person to whom the medication will be administered.^v Ideally, individuals can obtain a prescription for naloxone from their physician and have it filled at their local pharmacy or they can purchase naloxone at a pharmacy where the pharmacist dispenses it under a standing order from a prescriber.

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Is there abuse potential with naloxone?

Naloxone is not a controlled substance, it has no addictive or psychoactive properties and it has few side effects.^{vi} It has no effect on people who do not have opioids in their system. Individuals who regularly use opioids may experience withdrawal symptoms when given naloxone, particularly if higher doses are administered. These withdrawal symptoms, though unpleasant, are not life threatening, while the respiratory depression that occurs in opioid overdose can be fatal without prompt intervention.^{vii}

How can naloxone be obtained for pharmacy inventory?

Naloxone can be purchased in the United States through three pharmaceutical manufacturers, Hospira,^{viii} Amphastar,^{ix} and Kaléo.^x While the available formulations are all safe and effective, their prices vary. Intramuscular syringes with points at least 1 inch long (25 or 23 gauge are commonly used) are necessary for the intramuscular form of administration. The MAD300 atomizer used in the intranasal form of administration must be purchased separately from the medication itself through a medical supply vendor. Naloxone, which typically has a shelf life of about eighteen months, should be stored at room temperature and away from light.

What can pharmacists in New Jersey do to help?

In March 2014, The American Pharmacists Association's House of Delegates adopted policies to support developing laws and regulations promoting the role of pharmacists in naloxone distribution and the prevention of opioid-related deaths^{xi}. New Jersey's Board of Pharmacy is in the process of drafting regulations to guide pharmacists in the implementation of the *Overdose Prevention Act* and in the meantime has issued guidance for licensees who are presented with naloxone prescriptions.^{xii} Pharmacists can educate themselves, their colleagues and their patrons about the *Overdose Prevention Act*. Even more importantly, they can ensure that naloxone is available in their establishment—in addition to being prepared to fill prescriptions readily, pharmacists can dispense naloxone under a standing order from prescriber.

Do other states have similar laws?

Yes. As of April 10, 2015, thirty-one other states and the District of Columbia have enacted similar laws encouraging expanded access to naloxone to prevent overdose deaths.^{xiii}

Where can I get more information about naloxone?

For more information and additional resources about overdose prevention in New Jersey, please visit our website: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/njodinfo>

ⁱ <https://www.unodc.org/docs/treatment/overdose.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/overview/overdose-basics/responding-to-opioid-overdose/administer-naloxone/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/PostmarketDrugSafetyInformationforPatientsandProviders/ucm391449.htm>

^{iv} N.J.S.A. 24:6J-1 et seq. Retrieved from http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2012/Bills/AL13/46_.PDF

^v <http://www.state.nj.us/lps/ca/bme/applications/narcanwaiver.pdf>,

http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/divisions/dmhas/Naloxone/Naloxone_Info_For_Prescribers1.pdf

^{vi} http://prescribetoprevent.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/burris_stopping_a_ninvisible_epidemic.pdf

^{vii} <https://www.uwhealth.org/healthfacts/alcoholandotherdrugabuse/7266.pdf>

^{viii} http://www.hospira.com/en/products_and_services/drugs/NALOXONE_HYDROCHLORIDE

^{ix} <http://www.amphastar.com/assets/naloxone.pdf>

^x <http://www.evzio.com/hcp/about-evzio/how-to-order.php>

^{xi} <http://www.pharmacist.com/combating-opioid-drug-abuse-naloxone>

^{xii} <http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/pharm/Naloxone%20Guidance.pdf>

^{xiii} <https://www.networkforphl.org/asset/qz5pvn/network-naloxone-10-4.pdf>