

# Scouting Safety Moment: Prevention, Awareness and Responding to Opioid Overdose

## Key Facts for Scouts and Leaders

- Opioids are drugs that block pain and create feelings of pleasure or relaxation by binding to specific receptors in the brain and body.
- They include prescription medications like oxycodone and morphine, as well as illegal drugs like heroin and synthetic opioids like fentanyl. You can't see, smell, or taste fentanyl—just a tiny amount can be deadly.
- Opioids can be dangerous even when taken as prescribed, and all carry a risk of addiction and overdose.
- Overdose deaths among youth aged 10–19 have doubled in recent years, with fentanyl involved in the vast majority of cases. Youth may misuse prescription opioids for pain relief, to self-medicate untreated mental health challenges, stress, or peer pressure.
- Many overdoses involve mixing opioids with alcohol or other medications used for anxiety, insomnia, muscle spasms, or seizures (like benzodiazepines).
- Naloxone (Narcan) is a safe, legal medication that can reverse opioid overdoses and is available without a prescription in all 50 states.

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## Prevention and Preparedness

- Talk openly with Scouts about the risks of opioid use, addiction, and overdose.
- Encourage healthy coping strategies like sports, Scouting activities, art, or talking to trusted adults.
- Never take pills unless prescribed by your own doctor and filled at a licensed pharmacy.
- Sharing medication is dangerous—even if it looks real or comes from someone you trust. It may be counterfeit and often laced with dangerous substances.
- Store medications securely and dispose of unused opioids properly to prevent misuse.
- Carry naloxone at large events or outings—just like having a first aid kit ready.

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## Recognizing an Overdose

Signs of an opioid overdose include:

- Tiny pupils
- Cold, clammy, or bluish skin
- Slow or stopped breathing
- Snoring, choking, or gurgling sounds
- Unresponsiveness or unconsciousness

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## What to Do in an Overdose Emergency

1. **Call 911 Immediately**
  - Give the location and describe the situation clearly.
2. **Administer Naloxone (if available)**
  - Use a nasal spray like Narcan or an auto-injector.
  - Safe to use even if you're unsure whether opioids are involved.
3. **Perform Rescue Breathing**
  - If the person isn't breathing, give one breath every 5 seconds.
4. **Place in Recovery Position**
  - On their side, with the top leg crossed over to prevent choking.
5. **Stay Until Help Arrives**
  - Naloxone wears off in 30–90 minutes. The person may relapse into overdose.

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## Resources

- The Real Deal on Fentanyl: <https://www.realdealonfentanyl.com>
- CDC Opioid Facts: <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids>
- HHS Opioid Resources: <https://www.hhs.gov/opioids>
- Partnership to End Addiction Resources: <https://drugfree.org/fentanyl-poisoning/>