

Get Tested. Get Treated. Get Cured.

# HCV & Harm Reduction

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## OVERDOSE

When a person experiences an overdose it can be caused by either taking too much of a drug or having a mixture of many different drugs that overwhelm the body causing it to shut down.

Opiates like heroin slow down a person's breathing. This results in less oxygen getting to the brain and bloodstream. If a person's lips are blue, they nod off or you rub your knuckles across their sternum and they are unresponsive, these are often signs of an opiate overdose.

If you think someone (or yourself) may be experiencing an overdose call 911 and get help immediately. Many first responders carry the opiate-reversal drug naloxone or "Narcan." If given quickly enough this can save someone's life.

Even though overdose can be fatal, not everyone who overdoses will die. Many people experience a nonfatal overdose once, twice or multiple times. Non-fatal overdoses can still have many negative mental, emotional and physical health effects. Quickly addressing overdose as quickly as possible will save a

life. Putting practices in place to avoid them altogether is even more important.

Here are a few things you or someone you know can do to decrease the potential of overdose:

1. When possible try not to mix two different drugs together. Drugs like Opiates (Heroin, Morphine, Codeine, MS Contin), alcohol and marijuana are depressants. If mixed together they can increase the chances of breathing being fatally slowed.
2. Try to know as much as possible about where the drugs come from and what's in them. Additives like fentanyl (an opiate 50 times stronger than pure heroin) and carfentanil (an opiate 100 times stronger than fentanyl) amplify the potency of a drug like heroin. This results in a much stronger dose than expected making overdose much more likely.
3. Be trained on how to use Narcan and carry it with you. Many places throughout the U.S., like syringe exchange programs, train and give naloxone to people who are using

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opiates, as well as their family members. Supplying first responders like emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and police with Narcan is really important. Usually the first responder is a friend, family member or someone in the immediate area.

4. When possible have a friend or someone there with you.

The causes of substance misuse and overdose the solutions to it are complex. Reducing use, entering treatment and reaching complete abstinence is possible for everyone, but only if they are alive. Saving the lives of people who overdose and avoiding it altogether through planning is an important step in that process.

### REMEMBER:

Don't be hard on yourself, If possible visit a needle exchange site in your area to get help with ways to keep you safe. They will give you equipment and information about how to inject safely and staying healthy.

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Check out these other Harm Reduction Fact Sheets:

#### **Harm Reduction: Overview**

[http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/HarmReduction/Alcohol.pdf](http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/HarmReduction/Alcohol.pdf)

#### **Harm Reduction: Alcohol**

[http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/HarmReduction/Alcohol.pdf](http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/HarmReduction/Alcohol.pdf)

#### **Harm Reduction: Definitions**

[http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/HarmReduction/Definitions.pdf](http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/HarmReduction/Definitions.pdf)

#### **Harm Reduction: Indirect Sharing**

[http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets\\_pdf/HarmReduction/Sharing.pdf](http://hcvadvocate.org/hepatitis/factsheets_pdf/HarmReduction/Sharing.pdf)

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