

Understanding harm reduction

Harm reduction aims to reduce the risks when using opioids or other drugs and encourages safer behaviours. Harm reduction recognises that some people will continue to use opioids regardless of the risks. There are strategies that can be used to help lower the risk of harm and learn more about opioid safer injecting harm reduction strategies here.

Understanding risk and harm

While most people who use opioids or other drugs do not suffer serious harms, the use of any drug, whether legal or not, always carries risk. It is always safer not to inject opioids. People who inject are at higher risk of additional harms such as:

- Blood-borne viruses
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Damage to the circulatory system
- Increased likelihood of overdose.

If you are using opioids always carry naloxone which can be used to **reverse an opioid overdose**.

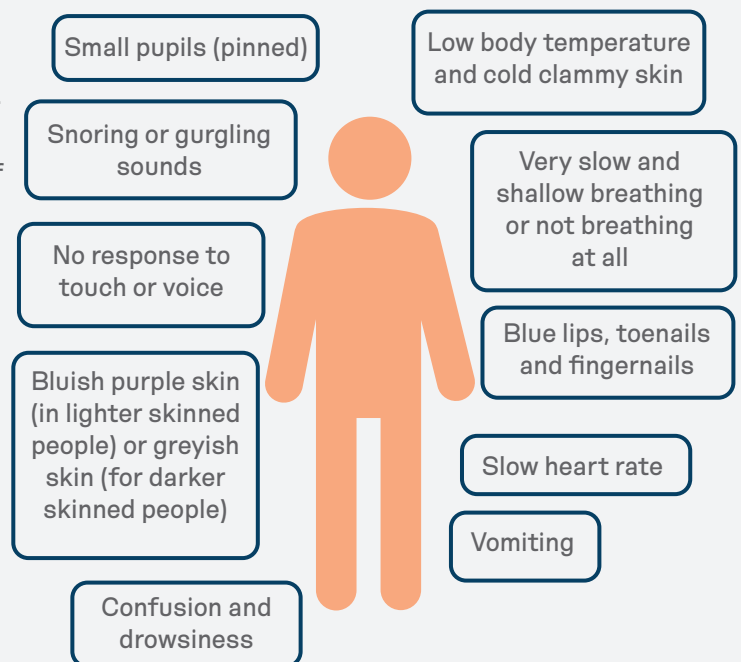
Understanding safer injecting

Injecting opioids can increase the risk of harm. However, there are strategies that can be used to help lower the risks.

- Some pharmaceutical opioids are typically not easily dissolved in water. It can be dangerous to try and inject them. Always seek advice from a needle and syringe program and use the correct equipment for what you are injecting.
- Always wash your hands first with soap and water.
- Never share equipment and always use new sterile equipment e.g., needles, syringes, water, stericup, swabs, filters and any other injecting equipment.
- Mix up with plenty of sterile water. If you can't get sterile water, use the following options in this order of preference: 1) boiled water that has been allowed to cool to room temperature; 2) tap water; 3) still bottled water (not sparkling).
- Always use a filter, even if your mix looks totally clear. Don't reuse filters.
- Before injecting, swab the injection site with an alcohol swab.
- Try to rotate your injecting sites regularly to help reduce vein damage. This will give your veins a chance to recover and reduces scarring.

- Always inject with the flow of blood and towards the heart. If you inject against the flow it can cause vein damage, pain, swelling and clotting.
- To help reduce the risk of harm to others and the environment. Store and dispose of all injecting equipment in a strong, plastic, puncture-proof container.

Signs of overdose: Opioids



Don't confuse sleep with loss of consciousness. If someone cannot be woken up, it is likely they are unconscious.

To reduce the risks of overdose:

- Do not use alone and use in a safe place.
- Test with a smaller amount and wait before having more.
- Do not mix substances together i.e. using opioids with other depressant drugs, such as alcohol, benzodiazepines, other opioids, or with over-the-counter, prescribed medications and other drugs.

Remember... If you have not used for a few days or more, been using less, or have been using a lower strength opioid, your body's tolerance will have been reduced.

This can mean you are more at risk of overdose.



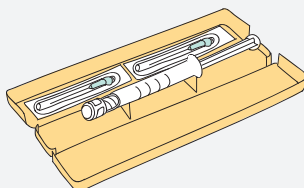
Naloxone Information

Naloxone is a drug that can **reverse an opioid overdose**. It is short acting, and non-addictive.



Nyxoid® is given into one nostril.

Narcan® and Prenoxad® is given by injection into a muscle of the overdosed person.



Naloxone is available at NSP's, and pharmacies as an over-the-counter medication.

It is recommended that anyone using opioids should have immediate access to naloxone either to be administered to them in the event of an opioid overdose or to administer to another person who has overdosed. For more information about naloxone speak to your doctor, chemist, local needle and syringe program, or contact Adis on **1800 177 833**.

What should I do in an emergency?

If a person has overdosed on opioids call an ambulance on **triple zero (000)** and if available administer naloxone.

If they have stopped breathing commence CPR. If they are breathing normally, place them into the recovery position and wait with the person until the ambulance has arrived.



What help is available?

Adis 24/7 Alcohol and Drug Support is a 24 hour, 7 day a week confidential support service for people in Queensland with alcohol and other drug concerns, their families and health professionals.

Talk to us. Anytime, anywhere.
1800 177 833

Disclaimer

This factsheet does not accept, condone or promote the use of alcohol or other drugs. While most people who use opioids do not suffer serious harms, the use of any drug, whether legal or not, always carries some risk. No amount of planning and care can ensure that your use of opioids is 'risk free' and the best way to avoid potential harms is to not use opioids. By developing this factsheet we are not suggesting that opioid use is safe.