

Stop opioid overdoses, save lives with Narcan

By Jace Dyckman

Narcan has emerged as a crucial tool in the fight against opioid overdose deaths. By ensuring that Narcan is readily available to those of us who may encounter opioid overdose situations, communities can reduce the devastating impact of the opioid crisis. All of us can help – first responders, healthcare providers, community organizations and businesses, persons who inject drugs and their friends and family members.

Last year, there were at least 194 suspected drug overdoses in Yellowstone County, including 39 suspected fatal overdoses.

So far in 2024, Yellowstone County law enforcement and other first responders have been called to 50 suspected overdoses, including one that resulted in death. Naloxone (brand name Narcan) was administered in 21 of the 50 suspected overdose calls. This medication stops opioid overdoses, but does not help people who have overdosed on other substances, such as methamphetamine.

Most overdose deaths in Montana and the United States involve fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is many times more powerful than heroin. Nonprescription fentanyl (often in blue M30 pills) is being used every day in our community. Sometimes, people don't even know they are using fentanyl because drug dealers have mixed it with other illicit drugs, including methamphetamine.

As prescription medicine for severe pain, fentanyl must be precisely administered to avoid overdose. As a street drug, fentanyl is lethal because the dosage is inconsistent and the user doesn't know how potent the pill or injection will be.

Narcan is a nasal spray containing a medication that can quickly reverse an overdose of opioids, such as, as morphine, heroin and fentanyl. You don't need to be a healthcare professional to carry Narcan to use in case you encounter an overdose emergency.

If Narcan is given to a person who isn't overdosing on opioids, it won't harm the person.

Montana law authorizes retail pharmacies to dispense Narcan on request – without a prescription. You can go to any pharmacy that stocks Narcan and purchase it. The pharmacy may bill your insurance company and there may be a copay.

Free Narcan

RiverStone Health can provide you Narcan at no cost. We can train you or your staff in about 15 minutes to recognize signs of an opioid overdose and to use Narcan. If you are interested in having Narcan for yourself or business, please call 406-651-6416.

One dose of this nasal spray can reverse an opioid overdose. A person who has overdosed sometimes requires more than one dose of Narcan. Even if it revives the person, they still should receive hospital emergency department care because the Narcan could wear off before the opioid does.

Signs that someone may have overdosed on opioids include:

- Nodding out or falling asleep.
- Unresponsive, passed out.
- Blue lips, blue fingers or slow breathing.
- Pinpoint eye pupils.

A collective effort is essential to ensure that Narcan reaches those who need it most. With Narcan, we can empower individuals with the knowledge and resources to respond effectively to opioid emergencies. We can save countless lives and bring hope to communities grappling with the opioid epidemic.

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