

More than 93,000 people in the United States died from a drug overdose in 2020, an increase of almost 30% from the previous year, The Washington Post reports. Opioid-related overdose deaths reached 69,710 last year, up from 50,963 in 2019, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Many of those deaths involved fentanyl. According to Nora Volkow, head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 70% of cocaine overdose deaths and 50% of methamphetamine overdose deaths also involved fentanyl. In many cases, people are not aware that the substances they use are laced with fentanyl. She noted that most of the deaths involve multiple substances.

Overdose deaths are preventable.

Opioids and Overdoses

Opioids are natural or synthetic drugs that are derived from – or related to – the opium poppy. Opioids attach to receptors in the central nervous system, reducing pain signals to the brain. Commonly used opioids include oxycodone, morphine, codeine, heroin, fentanyl, and methadone. Opioids dull the senses, inducing relaxation and euphoria. They slow down breathing and heart rate. Watch for these signs of overdose:

- No response to stimuli
- Shallow/slowed breathing
- Can't be woken up
- Unusual snoring/gurgling sounds
- Blue/grey lips or fingertips
- Floppy arms and legs.

When people overdose, they can stop breathing and may die or sustain brain damage. It can take hours for someone to die from an opioid overdose. Action taken as soon as possible could save a life. Do not assume the person is asleep. Do not let people at risk 'sleep it off.' Call an ambulance immediately. Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is a medication approved to prevent overdose by opioids. Naloxone is given when a person is showing signs of opioid overdose to block the toxic effects of the overdose and is often the difference between life and death. If you have access to Narcan/Naloxone, use it. If there has been no response after 3-5 minutes, give another dose. Record the time of administrations to provide to the paramedics. Note: Narcan/Naloxone will only temporarily reverse an overdose.

Free Naloxone is Available

The State of Indiana is funding a \$1.3 million distribution of naloxone to ensure the medication reaches Hoosiers who are at-risk of drug overdose. "Each dose of naloxone represents another life that could be saved and another opportunity to engage individuals with substance use disorder in treatment," Governor Holcomb said. Indiana reported a 33% increase in fatal overdoses in 2020, according to the CDC.

Overdose Lifeline, Inc., an Indiana nonprofit dedicated to helping those affected by substance use disorders, will distribute 35,000 doses of naloxone to first responders, families, friends and others who are likely to be the first on the scene if someone overdoses. Those who would like to receive a supply of naloxone can register online at overdoselifeline.org.

Every life is worth saving. Individuals with substance use disorders are someone's son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister, best friend, or other significant relationship. Overdose reversals give individuals the opportunity to seek treatment where they can learn to live substance-free.