

Joint Statement on Naloxone



College students are part of communities and part of the solution. We envision a state of Colorado with no opioid deaths. NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, the Coalition of Colorado Campus Alcohol and Drug Educators (CADE), and the Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention have collaborated on this joint statement regarding Naloxone to make recommendations for campus administrators regarding the use and storage of Narcan on campus.

Over a quarter million students are enrolled in colleges or universities in Colorado, and we know these students live, work, and play in communities beyond their college campus (IPEDS, 2017). Data from the recent American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment indicates 5.2% of college students report misusing prescription painkillers in Colorado in the past 12 months (CADE Data Set, 2019).

In 2017, over 1,000 Coloradans died due to a drug overdose, and 57% of those deaths involved an opioid (CDPHE, 2019). College students are not immune from these statistics as some of these deaths occurred in 18-25 year olds. About 2.5 million young adults aged 18 to 25 nationwide reported misusing opioids in the past year, which corresponds to about 7.3% of the young adult population (NSDUH, 2018). Students equipped with naloxone can be a part of the solution to Colorado's opioid crisis.

What is an opioid?

Opioids are powerful medications indeed — when prescribed by doctors and used correctly, medications such as oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and fentanyl can help relieve pain. They can help people get through surgeries, relieve cancer pain, recover from injuries, or manage chronic pain.

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone is an opioid antagonist, which means it stops the body from responding to opioids and temporarily reverses their effect. Naloxone knocks opioids off certain brain receptors and doesn't allow them to reconnect. The body reacts by going into withdrawal.

Naloxone (brand name Narcan) is extraordinarily safe, is available in over 500 pharmacies across Colorado, and is covered by Medicaid and most private health insurance. Naloxone has no abuse potential, and can be used on minors, and even on pets.

Colorado law allows anyone (yes, that includes students) to possess and use naloxone to prevent overdose deaths. The law also has Good Samaritan protections with civil and criminal liability protection for anyone administering naloxone to save a life and protects 911 callers from arrest if they are also in possession of or have been using drugs. Legislation was passed in 2019 that allowed school nurses and administrators to carry naloxone. In addition the bill stated in statute that naloxone can be made available wherever an automated external defibrillator (AED) is located. (Bill full text: https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/2019a_227_signed.pdf)

Availability of naloxone

Because of the scope of the opioid crisis, the US Surgeon General recommends knowing how to use naloxone and keeping it within reach. Therefore access to naloxone for students in a variety of settings (e.g. residence halls, Panhellenic organizations, campus police, other student housing, student health centers etc.) is recommended. Many universities throughout the U.S. have either developed on-campus naloxone policies or made naloxone available through student health services including the University of Texas at Austin, the Ohio State University, and Bridgewater State University.

There is no single identifiable characteristic for risk for overdose, and stigma contributes to the idea that the only people at risk for opioid overdose are homeless or are using street heroin. An overdose can happen when someone either takes too many opioids, takes a risky combination of opioids with alcohol, or takes another substance like a sleeping pill or anti-anxiety medication. Additionally, fentanyl, a powerful opioid, has been found in other drugs (e.g. MDMA, illicit Xanax) unbeknownst to the user. Therefore, making naloxone widely available and knowing how to use it is one means to ensure access to this life-saving drug and reduce stigma.

Having naloxone available doesn't increase drug use or misuse

According to the Drug Policy Alliance, several research studies have shown that naloxone access does not increase or promote drug use. The notion that naloxone promotes risky behavior perpetuates stigma among those with opioid use disorder. For more information, visit <http://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/naloxone>

Best practices for training and storage

Professional staff, student staff, and students at large can be trained to administer naloxone. Naloxone has no age restriction. You do not need to be certified or attend a lengthy training to administer naloxone. Multiple organizations offer free educational sessions on how to prevent, recognize, and reverse an opioid overdose using naloxone. Educational efforts can reduce risk factors for opioid overdose, discuss harm reduction policy, and provide awareness regarding laws and potential liabilities. For information on safe use, storage, and disposal practices, visit <https://takemedsseriously.org/>