

# INFORMATION BRIEF

## Opioids, Naloxone and Your Local Public Library

FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

*Please note: This is for information purposes only. Any claims made in this sheet should not be considered as medical or legal advice.*

### The Issue<sup>1</sup>

Death from drug overdose is recognized as an urgent public health issue across Canada. There were **336 opioid-related deaths in Ontario** from May to July 2017, compared with 201 during the same time period in 2016, representing a **68 per cent increase**. From July to September 2017, there were **2,449 emergency department visits** related to opioid overdoses, compared with 1,896 in the three months prior, representing a **29 per cent increase**.

While there are no current statistics regarding the prevalence of opioid overdoses in the library, **library patrons include those who are struggling with substance abuse**.

**Naloxone is a drug that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose**, and Naloxone kits may be made available to staff members in order to respond to a potential opioid overdose in the library.

### Public Libraries responding to the Opioid Crisis

**Some public libraries** across Canada have begun partnering with **local public health unit or harm reduction agency** to train staff members to respond to opioid overdoses.

Library leadership will determine the policy and procedures in responding to an overdose. Considerations will include:

**Need:** What is the level of need in your community? Do staff regularly encounter people who have overdosed? Do staff regularly encounter people who may use drugs? What are the potential consequences of not having naloxone available at your library?

**Integration across the library:** Is there a need for sharps containers at your library? Can Naloxone training be offered in conjunction with First Aid Training?

### WHAT ARE OPIOIDS?<sup>2</sup>

Opioids are drugs that are usually used to treat pain. Some commonly used opioids include:

- fentanyl
- morphine
- heroin
- methadone
- oxycodone

Any of these can be administered as tablets, capsules, syrups, liquids for injection, nose sprays, skin patches or suppositories.

### WHAT DO OPIOIDS DO?

Opioids belong to a group of drugs known as depressants. Depressants slow the activity of the brain and the body. Opioids decrease respiratory drive (the urge to breathe). As breathing decreases (and eventually stops), there is less oxygen in the blood, the lack of oxygen causes brain damage. Oxygen starvation results in organ failure of the heart, the brain, and eventually, death.

### WHAT IS NALOXONE?

Naloxone can temporarily reverse an overdose if it is administered right away. Naloxone can be administered while waiting for professional help to arrive.

<p><b>Partnerships:</b> Are there local community agencies (health unit, harm reduction agency, etc.) with whom the library can partner? Are there other agencies in the building who should be consulted / would benefit from shared training?</p>
<p><b>Supply:</b> How can Naloxone kits be acquired (purchase, via community partnerships, from the pharmacy, etc.)? How many Naloxone kits are needed on site?</p>
<p><b>EMS:</b> How long does it take for Emergency Medical Services to reach your public library?</p>
<p><b>Training:</b> If training is provided to staff members, will it be mandatory? Will all staff be trained? Will security staff be included in training?</p>
<p><b>Non-judgment:</b> How to ensure that staff are able to proceed only if they are comfortable to do so?</p>
<p><b>Staff wellness:</b> How would staff be supported following an incident? E.g. mindfulness training, counselling services, debriefing, etc.</p>
<p><b>Risk Management:</b> What safety protocols and procedures are required? Is there any insurance implication?</p>
<p><b>Policies:</b> How will incidents be recorded/documented? Will there be a written policy regarding Opioid overdose responses?</p>

## LIBRARIES AND NALOXONE

Naloxone kits and training on how to use them have been made available to library staff or security guards at:

- Toronto Public Library
- Niagara Falls Public Library
- Barrie Public Library
- Vancouver Public Library
- Calgary Public Library
- Edmonton Public Library
- Camrose Public Library

## WHO IS IMPACTED BY THE OPIOID CRISIS?

Opioid use, addiction, and overdose impact Ontarians and their families in communities large and small, from all socio-demographic backgrounds.

## Naloxone kits<sup>3</sup>

Naloxone is a drug that can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose. Some brand names include Narcan, Nalone, Evzio, Prenoxad, Narcanti, and Narcotan.

There are two kinds of Naloxone kits commonly available:

1. Injectable
2. Nasal Spray

Naloxone kits are offered to **police and fire services**. Some **school boards and community-based organizations** may also supply naloxone kits to their staff members, or distribute them to community members.

## Sourcing Naloxone kits

Naloxone kits can be acquired in a number of different ways. Some libraries purchase Naloxone kits themselves, acquire kits from pharmacies, or have kits supplied through partnerships with local community agencies.

For instance, Niagara Falls Public Library works in partnership with Streetworks, a local non-profit organization who supply the kits, pick up used kits, and provide training to staff.

In Ontario, Naloxone kits are available free to individuals by participating **Ontario pharmacies and select community agencies**. Individuals are eligible for a free kit if you are:

- a current opioid user or a past user who is at risk of using again
- a family member, friend or other person able to help someone at risk of an opioid overdose
- a client of a needle syringe program or hepatitis C program
- newly released from a correctional facility

## Risk Management

### Health and safety concerns

There are some risks to staff members associated with administering Naloxone. Staff training and library policy should address these concerns and can help increase staff capacity to mitigate these risks (e.g. provide gloves in all Naloxone kits, keep extra kits on hand in case of accidental transmission of the opioid, etc.).

Some concerns may include<sup>4</sup>:

1. Biological concerns: a person who is overdosing is likely to vomit.
2. Transmission of the opioid itself is also a risk. Some forms of opioids, including carfentanil, are so potent that transmission of even a few grains (either through the skin, inhaled or ingested) can be dangerous to the health of the responder.
3. Workers who are administering the drug have to be in close contact with the recipient. A person who is overdosing may be unpredictable and potentially confused about their surroundings. They may attempt to strike out if they feel threatened. Their conduct might increase the chance of injury, especially if they become aggressive during the withdrawal.

### The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act<sup>5</sup>

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act provides some legal protection for people who experience or witness an overdose and call 9-1-1 for help.

The act can protect you from:

- Charges for possession of a controlled substance (i.e. drugs) under section 4(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act
- Breach of conditions regarding simple possession of controlled substances (i.e. drugs) in:
  - o pre-trial release
  - o probation orders
  - o conditional sentences
  - o parole

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act applies to anyone seeking emergency support during an overdose, including the person experiencing an overdose. The act protects the person who seeks help, whether they stay or leave from the overdose scene before help arrives. The act also protects anyone else who is at the scene when help arrives.

The act **does not** provide legal protection against more serious offences, such as:

- outstanding warrants
- production and trafficking of controlled substances
- all other crimes not outlined within the act

## Opioid overdose<sup>2</sup>

Opioid drugs affect the part of your brain that controls your breathing. When you take more opioids than your body can handle (overdose), your breathing slows. This can lead to unconsciousness and even death.

### How to recognize an opioid overdose

Someone may have overdosed if they:

- can't stay awake, walk or talk
- are breathing slowly or not at all
- have a limp body

Other signs of overdose include:

- not responding to noise or knuckles being rubbed hard on their breastbone
- snoring or gurgling sounds
- pale or blue skin – especially on their nail beds and lips – and they feel cold
- tiny pupils (pinpoint) or their eyes are rolled back
- vomiting

### Responding to an opioid overdose

1. If you are with someone who has overdosed, **call 911 or your local emergency response number immediately.**
2. Follow your library's emergency response procedures, which may include:
  - o Perform rescue breathing and/or chest compressions
  - o administer naloxone

*Naloxone can temporarily reverse an overdose if it is administered right away. Naloxone can be administered while waiting for professional help to arrive.*

***An overdose is always an emergency. Even if someone has taken naloxone, it can wear off before the person has completely recovered from their overdose. They may need more than one dose.***

***Always call for help.***

## Works Cited:

1. **Government of Ontario** - News Release: Ontario Expanding Opioid Response as Crisis Grows, December 7, 2017. Accessed online: <https://news.ontario.ca/mohltc/en/2017/12/ontario-expanding-opioid-response-as-crisis-grows.html>
2. **Government of Ontario** - Recognize and temporarily reverse an opioid overdose, April 2018. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-naloxone-kits-free>
3. **Government of Ontario** - Ontario Public Drug Programs April 2018. <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/drugs/naloxone/>
4. **CUPE - Opioid overdose response** Mar 28, 2017. <https://cupe.ca/opioid-overdose-response>
5. **Government of Canada** – About the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act Aug 13, 2018. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/problematic-prescription-drug-use/opioids/about-good-samaritan-drug-overdose-act.html#a2>

# Additional Resources

## Library responses:

**Toronto Public Library** - Toronto Overdose Action Plan–Toronto Public Library Response. September 25, 2017. Accessed online: <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2017/sep25/21-toronto-overdose-action-plan-tpl-response-combined.pdf>

## Opioid and Naloxone:

**British Columbia Joint Task Force on Overdose Response** - Naloxone Risk Assessment Tool – For Non-Public Sector Organizations, May 2017. [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/overdose-awareness/naloxone\\_risk\\_assessment\\_-\\_non-governmental\\_sectors.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/overdose-awareness/naloxone_risk_assessment_-_non-governmental_sectors.pdf)

**City of Toronto Public Health** - Become a Harm Reduction Partner Agency. <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/overdose-resources-become-a-partner-agency/>

## Ontario College of Pharmacists. Naloxone FAQ.

June 2016. [https://www.opatoday.com/Media/Default/Tools%20and%20Forms%20-%20Naloxone/Naloxone\\_FAQ.pdf](https://www.opatoday.com/Media/Default/Tools%20and%20Forms%20-%20Naloxone/Naloxone_FAQ.pdf)

## Media reports - Opioid Crisis in Canada:

**CBC News** - How the opioid crisis could turn library workers into emergency responders. April 3, 2018. <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/episode-383-what-google-knows-about-you-naloxone-for-libraries-the-sound-of-the-jays-easter-island-more-1.4597061/how-the-opioid-crisis-could-turn-library-workers-into-emergency-responders-1.4597108>

**Toronto Star, May Warren** - How librarians are rising to their next challenge: the opioid crisis. April 16, 2018. <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/04/16/how-librarians-are-rising-to-their-next-challenge-the-opioid-crisis.html>

**Toronto Star, Francine Kopun** - Mental health association urging all public venues to stock naloxone kits. Nov. 20, 2017. <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/11/20/mental-health-association-urging-all-public-venues-to-stock-naloxone-kits.html>