

The Role of Medications in Preventing Opioid Overdose

Medications play an important role in preventing opioid overdoses and treating opioid use disorders. This material describes what these medications are and the role they play in overdose prevention.

MEDICATION-ASSISTED TREATMENT

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) involves using FDA-approved medications in conjunction with traditional counseling and behavioral therapies to treat, and help people manage, opioid use disorders. MAT is provided at opioid treatment programs that are accredited by SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT). Three medications used in MAT include:

- **Methadone and Buprenorphine.** These medications reduce opioid cravings and withdrawal symptoms, which can help people with opioid addiction actively focus and work on their recovery process. Common brand names include Methadose, Diskets, Dolophine (for methadone) and Buprenex, Butrans, and Probuphine (for buprenorphine).
- **Naltrexone.** This medication blocks the effects of opioids so people cannot experience the "high" misusing opioids produces, which may help prevent relapse among some people in recovery from opioid addiction. Common brand names for naltrexone include ReVia, Depade and Vivitrol.

OVERDOSE REVERSAL MEDICATIONS

A rescue medication called **naloxone** can halt and reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. This medication is most commonly administered by professional first responders (paramedics, emergency medical technicians, law enforcement officers, and firefighters) and lay first responders (people who use drugs, family members, friends, and people who work with these groups). Learn more about naloxone—and its common brand names—below:

- **Naloxone.** When administered during an overdose emergency, naloxone (which is the drug's generic name) reverses the effect that opioids have on the respiratory system and allows breathing to normalize. Naloxone can be administered through an injection or a nasal spray. It usually starts working within a few minutes and can last from 30-90 minutes. While one dose of naloxone can reverse an overdose, sometimes multiple doses are needed (especially in cases involving extremely potent opioids, like fentanyl). Naloxone has no abuse potential and cannot cause an overdose.
- **Narcan and Evzio.** While it is available in a generic, these are the most common brands for naloxone. Narcan is available in a nasal spray and Evzio is available in an auto-injector (a pre-measured spring-loaded syringe like an EpiPen).