

# NALOXONE:

## 5 Things Pharmacists Need to Know

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### 1. NALOXONE IS NOW A SCHEDULE II DRUG

On March 22, 2016, Health Canada delisted naloxone as a prescription drug.<sup>1</sup> The National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) then reclassified naloxone as a Schedule II medication when used in an emergency opioid overdose situation outside of hospital settings.

While most take-home naloxone kits currently contain intramuscular formulations of naloxone, there is an Interim Order, issued by the Minister of Health that allows the importation and sale of NARCAN® nasal spray for the emergency treatment of known or suspected opioid overdoses.<sup>2</sup> Like the parenteral

formulations, intranasal naloxone is also available without a prescription.

### 2. ONTARIANS WITH A HEALTH CARD ARE ELIGIBLE FOR A FREE TAKE-HOME NALOXONE KIT THROUGH THE ONTARIO NALOXONE PHARMACY PROGRAM

Pharmacies are provided up to \$70.00 for each naloxone kit they dispense and provide training on. Eligibility criteria for the program include anyone who is:

- Currently using opioids,
- A past opioid user who is at risk of returning to opioid use, or
- A family member, friend, or other person in a position to

assist a person at risk of opioid overdose.<sup>3</sup>

Essentially, any Ontarian with a health card should be provided with a naloxone kit and training, upon request. Pharmacists' main role in this program is to provide education to naloxone kit recipients and minimize barriers to access. Those who do not have health cards can be directed to local public health units. Intranasal naloxone is available for free for recently released at-risk inmates.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. PATIENTS ON CHRONIC OPIOID THERAPY SHOULD BE OFFERED A TAKE-HOME NALOXONE KIT

While there are known factors that increase the risk of opioid overdose, including concurrent use of other sedating agents (e.g., alcohol, benzodiazepines) and concomitant medical conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), it is clear that there is a link between daily doses and overdose death. The risk of opioid-related mortality is increased even at doses of 50 mg of morphine equivalents per day.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, take-home naloxone kits should be proactively offered to anyone on chronic opioid therapy, regardless of dose.

WHAT  
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Given the profound stigma around people living with substance use disorders, pharmacists may encounter patients on opioids who do not wish to receive a naloxone kit. Pharmacists can highlight that having a naloxone kit around the house is a way to protect the person using opioids, and anyone who may inadvertently consume them, and describe it as similar to having a first-aid kit.

#### 4. PRE-ASSEMBLED TAKE-HOME NALOXONE KITS ARE AVAILABLE

Pharmacies no longer have to self-assemble take-home naloxone kits as pre-assembled ones are available for ordering. Pharmacies are encouraged to check with their usual pharmaceutical distribution channels.

#### 5. RESOURCES EXIST TO SUPPORT PHARMACISTS IN PROVIDING NALOXONE KIT TRAINING

##### **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health:**

- Pharmacists' Checklist ([vial](#) or [ampoule](#))
- "[5 Steps to Save a Life](#)" kit insert for naloxone kit recipients
- [Poster for dispensing area](#)
- [Portico clinical tools for opioid misuse and addiction](#), including specific naloxone resources

##### **University of Waterloo**

- [Naloxone at pharmacies: what you need to know to combat the opioid crisis](#)
- [Video: How to administer naloxone \(ampoule\)](#)  
\*Note: do not need to open (or use) an alcohol wipe to open an ampoule

##### **Ontario College of Pharmacists**

- [Guidance for Pharmacists on Dispensing or Selling Naloxone](#)

##### **Ontario Pharmacists Association**

- [Take home naloxone in community pharmacies: online module](#) 



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