



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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Public Health Division

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To:	Santa Cruz County Healthcare Providers
From:	Gail Newel, MD, MPH, County Health Officer
Subject:	Information on Prescribing Narcan® (naloxone)
Date:	June 15, 2022

Situational Update: Over the past 15 years, individuals, families, and communities across our Nation have been tragically affected by the opioid epidemic, with the growing number of overdose deaths from prescription and illicit opioids. Locally, accidental deaths due to opioids have more than doubled from 17 in 2017 to 41 in 2020. This steep increase is attributed to the rapid proliferation of illicitly made fentanyl and other highly potent synthetic opioids. These highly potent opioids are being mixed with heroin, sold alone as super-potent heroin, pressed into counterfeit tablets to look like commonly misused prescription opioids or sedatives (e.g., Xanax), and being mixed (often unknowingly) with other illicit drugs like cocaine or methamphetamine. The resulting unpredictability in illegal drug products is dramatically increasing the risk of a fatal overdose. Another contributing factor to the rise in opioid overdose deaths is an increasing number of individuals receiving higher doses of prescription opioids for long-term management of chronic pain. Even when taking their pain medications as prescribed, these patients are at increased risk of accidental overdose as well as drug-alcohol or drug-drug interactions with sedating medications, such as benzodiazepines (anxiety or sleep medications). (<https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00438.asp>).

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Naloxone is an opioid antagonist that is used to temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, namely slowed or stopped breathing. Expanding the awareness and availability of this medication is a key part of the public health response to the opioid epidemic. Naloxone is a safe antidote to a suspected overdose and, when given in time, can save a life. Research shows that when naloxone and overdose education are available to community members, overdose deaths decrease in those communities. Most health insurance covers naloxone, including Medi-Cal. Although pharmacists in California may dispense naloxone without a prescription, many are uncomfortable doing so without a prescription from a healthcare provider.

- **Healthcare providers are asked to prescribe Narcan® (naloxone) to any patient or parent or guardian who requests a prescription. In addition, naloxone should be prescribed to every patient meeting the following criteria.** Patients, family and friends of those at risk should be encouraged to keep naloxone with them at all times.
 - Patients who have access to ANY street-purchased drugs.
 - When factors that increase risk for overdose or concurrent benzodiazepine use are present.

- Patients are misusing prescription opioids (like oxycodone) or using heroin or illicit synthetic opioids (like fentanyl or carfentanyl).
- Have an opioid use disorder, especially those completing opioid detoxification or being discharged from treatment that does not include ongoing use of methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone.
- Recently discharged from emergency medical care following an opioid overdose.
- Recently released from incarceration with a history of opioid misuse or opioid use disorder

Other things to consider when prescribing naloxone:

- Does this patient currently use or have a history of using either illicit or prescription opioids?
 - If yes, it would be appropriate to prescribe naloxone.
- Is this patient in contact with anyone who uses or has a history of using either illicit or prescription opioids?
 - If yes, it would be appropriate to prescribe naloxone.
- Does this patient have a known hypersensitivity to naloxone?
 - If yes, **do not** prescribe naloxone.

Below is an example of a prescription:

Intranasal branded (Narcan Nasal Spray) (naloxone 4mg/ 0.1 mL)

Sig: Spray 0.1 mL (contents of one device) into one nostril upon signs of opioid overdose. Call 911. May repeat once if no response within 2-3 minutes.

Dispense # ____.

- Patients can also be referred to the programs below:
 - The Santa Cruz County Syringe Service Program (SSP) - www.santacruzhealth.org/SSP
 - Harm Reduction Coalition of Santa Cruz County hotline at (831)-769-4700 (call or text)
 - [Janus of Santa Cruz County](http://JanusofSantaCruzCounty.org) (866-526-8772)
- Initiate or refer patients with opioid use disorder to treatment. Medical Assisted Treatment (MAT) can be accessed at all the community clinics and health care entities in Santa Cruz and can also be initiated at both Emergency Rooms through ED Bridge (CABridge.org). See [Recovery Wave](#) for specific information on access to MAT.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Fentanyl Facts](#) – Developed in partnership with SafeRx Santa Cruz County
- [Prevent & Protect, Frequently Asked Questions about Naloxone, 2018](#)
- [Naloxone: The Opioid Reversal Drug that Saves Lives](#)
- [Evidenced-Based Strategies for Preventing Opioid Overdose: What’s Working in the United States](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse. Opioid Overdose Reversal with Naloxone \(Narcan, Evzio\). January 2018](#)
- [SafeRx Santa Cruz County website](#) for more resources. In particular, the [Padlet](#) contains helpful information related to Narcan.

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.