

FAQs for Patrol Officers: Responding to Opioid Overdose During COVID-19

The number one rule in law enforcement is to come home safe at the end of your day. During the COVID-19 pandemic, you can still safely assist members of the community who are overdosing if you are prepared and take precautions. By providing this help, you can prevent needless deaths and connect people to community-based services that will help them stay safe, live healthier lives, address their mental health needs, and avoid future crime.

Law enforcement commanders report that their officers who have successfully revived community members from overdose have found it to be a profound and rewarding experience. They also report that overdose reversal by officers helps build positive connections between the agency and community. Below are answers to questions you may have about overdose response.

What is an opioid overdose? An opioid overdose occurs when a person consumes substances that overwhelm the part of the brain in charge of breathing. Overdoses can occur after taking



“Giving people another chance on life through naloxone administration is one way we work with our communities.”

RONALD MARTIN, DETECTIVE SERGEANT, NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT (RETIRED)



“We can and should continue to save people who have overdosed during COVID-19.”

LARS PAUL, CAPTAIN, FAYETTEVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT, NC (RETIRED)

too much of an opioid (such as oxycodone, heroin, or fentanyl) or when taking another drug (such as methamphetamine, cocaine, crack, or benzodiazepines) that are intentionally or accidentally combined with an opioid. There are many reasons why a person might consume a potentially fatal dose of drugs. Whatever the reason, the person’s life is worth saving.

Why is it important to respond to an overdose? An overdose is an acute poisoning that can result in death without timely intervention. As a patrol officer, you may be the first official on the scene. If you wait for a paramedic to arrive and handle the situation, the person in overdose may die.

How can a law enforcement officer safely respond to an overdose? For your personal safety, it is essential that you wear the personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by your department, such as a mask, gloves, and protective eyewear (goggles or a disposable shield) that fully covers the front and sides of the face. If you have an extra mask, place that over the face of the person who has overdosed.

This document is intended to be shared with patrol officers as training or refresher guidance for opioid overdose response. A companion document, “For Law Enforcement Department Leaders: Training Patrol Officers for Opioid Overdose Response During COVID-19,” is intended for personnel who plan and conduct such training. These documents were reviewed and endorsed by:

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What are the steps in overdose response?

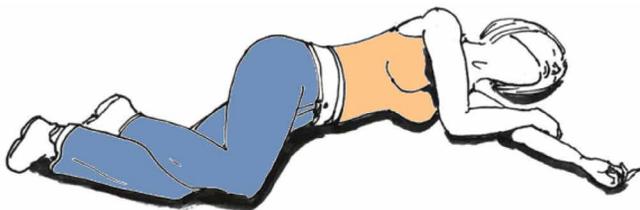
1. Perform sternal rub. Check to see if a painful sensation will wake the person up. A sternal rub is a way to cause enough pain to wake someone who is barely conscious without injuring them. To perform a sternal rub, run the knuckles of your gloved fist up and down their chest along the chest bone or sternum. If the person does not awaken, proceed to the next step.



2. Revive the person with the opioid overdose reversal drug, naloxone. Keep the naloxone issued to you by your department on your person, in your “go bag”, or in your vehicle, for rapid access when an overdose situation is encountered. There is no need to change how you administer naloxone because of COVID-19. Administer it the same way you would at any other time. Use a second dose if the person does not become conscious within 3 minutes of the first dose being administered.

3. Resuscitate if needed. If naloxone is not available, or if the person who is overdosing does not awaken following administration of naloxone, start resuscitation. Follow the procedures you have learned in professional training. For many law enforcement departments, particularly during COVID-19, the recommended method is hands-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), also called chest compressions.

4. Place in rescue position. To keep a semiconscious person from choking on vomit or smothering, place them on their left side with the left arm stretched out perpendicular to their body and their right leg bent so their ankle is resting on the upper calf of their left leg.



5. Reorient the individual. The person who has been administered naloxone will awaken into an immediate withdrawal, which can have severe flu-like symptoms including nausea, irritability,

Steps In Hands-Only CPR

- Place the heel of one hand on the center of the person’s chest.
- Place the heel of the other hand on top of the first hand.
- Keep arms straight and shoulders directly over hands.
- Push hard and fast, compressing chest at least 2 inches.
- Let chest rise between each compression.
- Rate should be 100-120 times per minute. Thinking of the rhythm to the Bee Gees song “Staying Alive” will help you get the right rate.



Steps In Rescue Breathing

- Put on a mouth barrier device if you have one.
- Tilt the person’s head back slightly.
- Pinch their nose.
- Give 1 breath every five seconds until the person is breathing on their own.



and achiness. Some people may be upset that they are in withdrawal and no longer feel euphoria or have their pain managed, or because they did not know they were overdosing and are confused about what is happening. Infrequently, a person wakes up combatively. You can calm the person by immediately reorienting them to what just happened. You may need to repeat yourself several times.



“COVID-19 has put many extra strains on law enforcement, leading to multiple changes in our practice and procedures. What hasn’t changed is our mission to serve and protect our communities.”

DONNIE VARNELL, INVESTIGATOR, DARE COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE; SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE OF DIVERSION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES UNIT, STATE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, NC (RETIRED)

The reorientation you provide should also include information about legal rights under 911 Good Samaritan laws, for both the person who was resuscitated and others on the scene to help calm them as well. Your law enforcement agency can inform you of the laws operating in your jurisdiction.

Even when reoriented, most people may not be in a state to thank you for rescuing them. However, you have just successfully revived a person and referred them to vital services that could protect them from future overdose. You can feel very good about the significant acts of service you just performed.

Should you make arrests after the overdose recovery? Good Samaritan laws in your jurisdiction may offer people at the scene immunity from arrest, charge, or prosecution for drug and paraphernalia possession, minor offenses, or probation or parole violations. Even if an arrest action is warranted, a better outcome may come from using discretion to avoid charging people at the scene. The individual who is revived following overdose may seek care and treatment with medication if they are able to focus on their health instead of legal matters. Another reason to exercise discretion is that other people on the scene may be encouraged to do the right thing again in the future if calling for help does not lead to bad outcomes for themselves.

What should you do after the recovery? Give the person who overdosed one or more naloxone kits to have in case of future overdoses. Your law enforcement agency or a partner agency

can arrange for bulk supplies of naloxone so that you have kits to distribute. Your agency may also provide you with a referral sheet that you can give to the person who overdosed and that lists follow-up care options. The person can make use of the information after they have time to recover and reflect on the incident. If you have extra supplies, provide naloxone kits and copies of the referral sheet to others at the scene of an overdose.

When you get back to headquarters, restock your supply of PPE, naloxone, and referral sheets.

Also, share your success stories. When you encourage other officers to be proactive at the scene of an overdose, you indirectly save additional lives.

Things to say after reviving someone.

- You took a substance that caused you to stop breathing.
- I am here to help.
- I gave you a medication that helped you breathe again, but it can cause flu-like symptoms.
- The side effects of the medicine I gave you should go away in a half hour to 90 minutes.
- In the meantime, do not take any medications or other substance(s), because that can cause you to stop breathing again.
- You could slip back into overdose, so you need to have someone watch you for the rest of the day.
- I recommended that you immediately go to a hospital, health care provider, or community-based service provider.
- Here are some resources to help you stay clear of another overdose (give them naloxone kit and referral sheet).

“It’s vital that we connect the person who overdosed to care and educate their family members and loved ones about overdose response. This can prevent future overdoses and reduce crime, especially property crime.”

DANIEL P. MELOY, CHIEF OF POLICE AND DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SAFETY, COLERAIN TOWNSHIP, OH (RETIRED), AND FOUNDER, QRT NATIONAL AND DPM INNOVATION CONSULTING