

Opioid Overdose, Naloxone, and Pennsylvania Law

PA Governor's Disaster Declaration

On January 10, 2018, Governor Tom Wolf declared the opioid epidemic a statewide disaster. Under this declaration, emergency service providers are now able to leave naloxone behind after a 911 visit. Naloxone, commonly referred to by the brand name Narcan®, or Evzio® is an opioid overdose reversal medicine that will save lives and hopefully lead an individual toward the substance abuse treatment he/she desperately needs.

Opioid Overdose Reversal Act 139 (David's Law)

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in deaths resulting from heroin, prescription opioids, fentanyl, or a combination thereof. The Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) is working to help reverse these horrifying trends and help our citizens who struggle with addiction. The enactment of ACT 139—David's Law—provides first responders, friends and families access to naloxone, Act 139 is a law that allows first responders (law enforcement, fire fighters, EMS) acting at the direction of a healthcare professional authorized to prescribe naloxone, to administer the drug to individuals experiencing an opioid overdose. The law also provides immunity from prosecution for those responding to and reporting overdoses. Additionally, individuals such as friends or family members in a position to assist a person at risk of experiencing an opioid related overdose may receive a prescription for naloxone.

What Does This Mean for You?

Members of the community, family members, friends, and bystanders may be prescribed naloxone and can lawfully administer naloxone to someone who is experiencing an overdose. Pennsylvania's Physician General has written standing orders for the general public to be able to obtain naloxone without a prescription from his/her doctor. Although not necessary in order to obtain the medication, it is highly recommended that individuals receive training to recognize the signs and symptoms of an overdose and to learn how to properly administer naloxone. Friends, family and non-licensed, non-certified first responder agencies can visit the following website for excellent training information: GetNaloxoneNow.org



What Exactly is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a medication that can temporarily reverse an overdose that is caused by an opioid drug (i.e. prescription pain medication or heroin). When administered during an overdose, naloxone blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and restores breathing within two to eight minutes. Naloxone has only one function: to reverse the effects of opioids on the brain and respiratory system temporarily in order to prevent death until emergency medical assistance is obtained. More specific information about naloxone can be found on the Naloxone Frequently Asked Questions webpage: http://www.ddap.pa.gov/overdose/Pages/Naloxone_FAQ.aspx

What is the Good Samaritan Provision?

Through the Good Samaritan Provision of Act 139, friends and loved ones are encouraged to summon emergency medical services by calling 911 in the event they witness an overdose. The law is meant to suppress the fear of arrest in calling authorities for an overdose event by offering certain criminal and civil protections for those who do. Law enforcement entities in other states that have implemented Good Samaritan protections for those who dial 911 in good faith have reported significant improvements in community relations.