CalOptima Health

Pharmacy Update
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Coprescribing Naloxone With Opioids

Drug overdose remains one of the leading causes of accidental death in the United States. In 2024, opioids contributed to 51,088 of 72,697, or 70%, of preventable overdose deaths.[1] In response to the ongoing impact of opioid-related overdose, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a national advisory in 2018 urging more Americans to carry naloxone.[2] In California, Assembly Bill 2760 requires prescribers to provide education and offer a naloxone prescription to high-risk patients.[3]

Why should naloxone be offered to patients?

Naloxone is a mu-opioid receptor antagonist that reverses opioid-induced respiratory and central nervous system depression.[4] Overdose education and naloxone distribution programs have been linked to reductions in opioid overdose death rates of up to 46%.[5] A 2024 study also found that implementation of pharmacy naloxone standing orders was associated with significant reductions in opioid fatality rates.[6] More than 1.9 million naloxone prescriptions were dispensed from U.S. retail pharmacies in 2024, while the national dispensing rate remained unchanged from 2023.[7]

Who should receive naloxone?

The 2022 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Clinical Practice Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Pain recommends coprescribing naloxone when one or more of the following risk factors for overdose are present:[8]

- Higher opioid dosages (e.g., ≥50 MME per day)
- Concurrent benzodiazepine use (regardless of opioid dose)
- History of overdose or substance use disorder
- Sleep-disordered breathing (e.g., sleep apnea)
- Risk of returning to a high dose for which opioid tolerance is lost (e.g., patients undergoing tapering)

Additionally, California Civil Code §1714.22 allows for licensed health care providers to prescribe naloxone to a family member, friend or another person in a position to assist a person at risk of an overdose.[9]

How can I help?

Consider the following opioid reversal agents for your patients at high risk for opioid overdose:

Formulations	Recommended Dosing[4]
naloxone 0.4 mg/mL carpuject	Inject 0.4 to 2 mg intramuscularly or subcutaneously. May repeat every two to three minutes until medical assistance arrives.
naloxone 0.4 mg/mL, 4 mg/10 mL vial	
naloxone 0.4 mg/mL, 2 mg/2 mL syringe	
naloxone (Narcan) 4 mg nasal spray*	Place one spray in one nostril. May repeat every two to three minutes in alternating nostrils with a new nasal spray until medical assistance arrives.
naloxone (Kloxxado) 8 mg nasal spray	

*Covered by Medi-Cal Rx only

References

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6. Xuan Z, Walley AY, Yan S, Chatterjee A, Green TG, Pollini RA. Pharmacy Naloxone Standing Order and Community Opioid Fatality Rates Over Time. JAMA Netw Open. 2024 August 1;7(8):e2427236. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.27236. PMID: 39207758; PMCID: PMC11362859.
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9. An act to amend Section 1714.22 of the Civil Code, relating to drug overdose treatment. Cal. Civil Code §1714.22 (2014).