

Overdose Prevention



One person dies every **19 MINUTES** from drug overdose in the United States and this increasing trend is driven by Rx painkillers.

Opioid pain relievers are responsible for more overdose deaths than cocaine and heroin combined.

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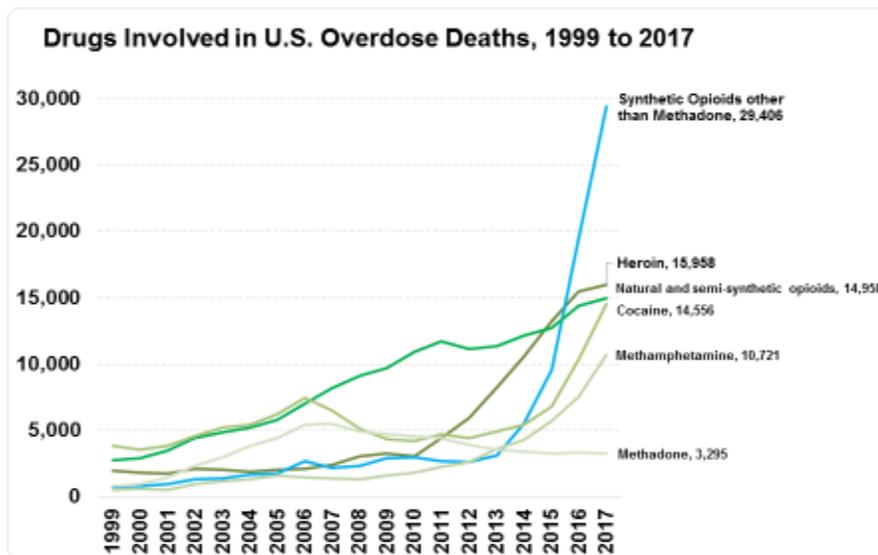
Published by The Partnership at Drugfree.org. Visit MedicineAbuseProject.org for more details.

“Drug overdose is one of the leading causes of accidental death in the United States”

(Online: <https://harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/> ).

“When we hear overdose, many of us think of Opioid Overdose. We have seen a steady increase of opioid overdose over the last several years. The National Institute on Drug Abuse shows the rates of opioid overdose in the United States has been climbing”

(NIH Online: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>)



## Maine

In Maine, fentanyl has been responsible for the increase in overdose deaths from opioids. In June, Dr. Sorg of the University of Maine, Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center reported, “The first quarter figures show that while drug fatalities for the period are similar to the number for the same period of the prior year, the proportion of deaths involving fentanyl increased. The first quarter of 2017 saw 89 drug overdose deaths, compared to 86 in the same period of 2018. In all of 2017 there were 418 drug induced deaths.

The proportion of deaths in 2018 is increasingly due to illicit drugs, especially fentanyl, as opposed to pharmaceutical opioids. Fentanyl was basically nonexistent on Maine streets two years ago, and last year it killed 247 Mainers — more than those who fatally overdosed on heroin, according to the attorney general’s office” (Online: <https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/2018/06/05/dr-sorgs-research-reveals-increasing-role-fentanyl-maine-drug-deaths/> ).

## College Students

A recent study was conducted at a large university in the Midwest. This study was to understand opioid misuse among college students. The study “sought to characterize individuals who misuse prescription opioids and the differences between current, past and non-misusers” The research was published in The American Journal on Addictions In an article titled, **“Prescription opioid medication misuse among university students”**

The inquiry consisted of a 156-item survey. “This survey was administered to over 9,449 university students at a large, public Midwestern university. Survey questions obtained demographic information, self-reported grade point average, sexual behavior, mental health characteristics, and substance use.

Participants also completed assessments that asked questions regarding impulsivity, mental health, substance use, and other impulsive behaviors including gambling and sexual activity. 3,522 students completed the survey and were included in the analysis. The results concluded, of this group, 2.2% reported misusing prescription opioids in the last 12 months and another 5.3% reported misusing prescription opioids previously but not in the past year. This study found prescription opioid misusers to be more likely to live off campus, have a lower GPA, and exhibit increased impulsivity” (Online: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/ajad.12807>). For more information: (Online: <https://hecaod.osu.edu/prescription-opioid-misuse-among-university-students/> )

Ohio State University, Higher Education Center reported the national data amongst college students using prescription drugs as follows; **4.6% are in recovery, 82.2% have no use, 2.7% have some risk, 1.7% have moderate risk and 8.8% have high risk**

“While Opioid addiction and overdoses are more rare on campuses than among young adults in the general population, schools are not immune to the problem. Many colleges are increasingly concerned about how to keep students safe and are making Naloxone also known as Narcan readily available” (Online: [https://www.npr.org/2018/10/22/658471440/on-college-campuses-making-overdose-medication-readily-available?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=npr&utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_content=2051&fbclid=IwAR1YkbXvfvKHg8Bq52kb0tGxAC-KyfAvtj7QIC4UzbazQZyygqI3\\_MpDOGQ&ct=t%28UReport\\_October+29%29](https://www.npr.org/2018/10/22/658471440/on-college-campuses-making-overdose-medication-readily-available?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=2051&fbclid=IwAR1YkbXvfvKHg8Bq52kb0tGxAC-KyfAvtj7QIC4UzbazQZyygqI3_MpDOGQ&ct=t%28UReport_October+29%29) ).

***The University of Southern Maine is on board with student safety and has naloxone available to help students.***

***University Health Center in Gorham, The ROCC and USM Campus Safety are trained to use naloxone and assist students who may be experiencing opioid overdose.***

## **Opioid Overdose**

Recognizing an opioid overdose can be difficult. If you aren’t sure, it is best to treat the situation like an overdose—you could save a life. It is important that you don’t leave the person alone and make sure you call 911 or seek medical care for the individual. Signs may include any of the following:

- Small, constricted “pinpoint pupils”      Falling asleep or loss of consciousness
- Slow, shallow breathing                              Choking or gurgling sounds
- Limp body    Pale, blue, or cold skin

(CDC Online: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prevention/index.html>)



- Uncoordinated muscle movements. Tremors.
- Profoundly altered mental status. Stupor.
- Coma.

In rare cases, a person may have **serious complications** following a benzodiazepine overdose. These may be a result of the associated respiratory distress, lack of oxygenated blood, or physical trauma caused from loss of consciousness and/or period of extended immobility on a hard surface (e.g., the ground), and can include <sup>5</sup>:

- Pneumonia                      Muscle damage                      Brain damage
- Death

(Online: Drugabuse.com)

### **Signs and Symptoms of Ecstasy and MDMA Overdose**

Ecstasy produces serious side effects when taken in excess. Users may take 1–2 (sometimes more) tablets at once or a series of them over a short period. This pattern dramatically increases the risk of overdose <sup>2</sup>. Doses vary, and the presence of other drugs—whether from adulterated MDMA or when taken along with the drug—produces its own harmful side effects.

**Signs and symptoms of MDMA intoxication** manifest across multiple body systems and include:

- Uncontrolled body movements.
- Confusion and other changes in mental status.
- Restlessness and anxiety, even paranoia.
- Headache and blurred vision.
- Clenched jaws.
- Elevated body temperature, chills, and excessive sweating.
- Abdominal cramping, nausea, and vomiting.
- Irregular and rapid heart rate along with chest pains.
- Increased blood pressure.
- Urinary retention and delayed orgasm.

Overdose of ecstasy is indicated when these symptoms advance in intensity and dangerous conditions emerge, including renal failure and cardiac arrhythmias. Other symptoms of an overdose include:

Hyperthermia—a dangerous overheating of the body.      Very high blood pressure.  
Fainting spells      Loss of consciousness      Seizures      Panic attacks.

(Online: Drugabuse.com)

### Signs and Symptoms of Cocaine Overdose

When a person abuses cocaine, their body experiences a number of sensations and physiologic changes, all relating back to its strong stimulant effects. These effects can spiral out of control when a person uses too much, leading to an overdose. During a cocaine overdose, the brain and body become dangerously overstimulated—resulting in a situation wherein commonly experienced cocaine effects, such as increased heart rate, are elevated to potentially lethal levels.

Woman experiencing severe anxiety, a cocaine overdose symptom

Arrhythmias (irregular heart rhythm)	Severe tachycardia (elevated heart rate).	
Very high blood pressure	Dangerously high body temperature.	
Sweating	Nausea	Confusion.
Severe anxiety or agitation	Psychosis	Tremors
Seizures	Stroke	

The likelihood of an overdose is difficult to predict, as it can be influenced by a number of variables, including the purity of the sample, the method in which it is used, and the general health of the user.

**Make no mistake, though, even first-time users can die for cocaine overdose.**

(Online: Drugabuse.com)

**Alcohol, Marijuana, Adderall and Ritalin** often referred to as **smart or study drugs**, are seen more commonly on college campuses. **These substances also carry high risk of overdose.**

### Signs and Symptoms of Marijuana Overdose

While rare, a marijuana overdose is still possible in some cases. Signs and symptoms of marijuana overdose might include:

- Extreme anxiety or panic attacks.
- Psychotic reactions in which someone loses touch with reality or becomes paranoid, sometimes in the form of hallucinations, delusions, or a loss of personal identity.

- Decreased judgment, perception, and coordination that can lead to injuries or even death.
- A fast heart rate, chest pain, or heart attack.
- Uncontrollable shaking or seizures.                      Pale skin color.
- Unresponsiveness.    Sudden high blood pressure with headache.

Noticeable side effects of smoked marijuana may last from 1 to 3 hours, while marijuana consumed in food or drink may last for several hours.

**A note on edibles:**

- **It can take 15 minutes to 2 hours for the effects of edibles to kick in!** Everyone digests at different rates and absorbs drugs into their bloodstream at different rates. **So, if you take one recommended serving of an edible, and still don't feel anything an hour later, don't take more! You could take too much and overdose.**

(<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000016.htm>)

**Signs and Symptoms of an Adderall Overdose (Smart or Study Drugs)**

It's important to note, studies indicate prescription stimulants taken by individuals without Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity disorder, do not increase or enhance their learning, thinking or cognitive abilities. In fact, studies **have shown that students who do not have ADHD and use these drugs in high school or college actually have lower GPAs.**

Common signs and symptoms of an Adderall overdose may include one or more of the following <sup>4</sup>:

- Aggression.                      Anxiety.                      Panic.                      Depression.
- Blurry vision.                      Disorientation.                      Hallucinations.                      Rapid breathing.
- Uncontrollable shaking.      Rapid heart rate. Fever. Upset stomach.
- Diarrhea.                      Fatigue.                      Muscle aches and weakness.
- Fainting.                      Tremors.                      Seizures.
- Loss of consciousness      Rhabdomyolysis, or muscle tissue breakdown.
- Dark red or brown urine (secondary to rhabdomyolysis).

## **Alcohol Overdose**

“Alcohol depresses nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing and the gag reflex (which prevents choking). A fatal dose of alcohol will eventually stop these functions.

It is common for someone who drank excessive alcohol to vomit since alcohol is an irritant to the stomach. There is then the danger of choking on vomit, which could cause death by asphyxiation in a person who is not conscious because of intoxication.

You should also know that a **person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) can continue to rise even while he or she is passed out**. Even after a person stops drinking, alcohol in the stomach and intestine continues to enter the bloodstream and circulate throughout the body. It is dangerous to assume the person will be fine by sleeping it off” (College Drinking- Changing the Culture. Online: <https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/parentsandstudents/students/factsheets/factsaboutalcoholpoisoning.aspx> )

### **Risk Factors for Alcohol Overdose**

- **Tolerance.**
- **Lack of familiarity with personal limits.**
- **Binge drinking.**
- **Rapid consumption.**

“**Tolerance** refers to the seemingly diminishing effect of alcohol as a person drinks more often and in higher quantities. The more a person drinks, the more accustomed their brain becomes to the presence of alcohol, and they will begin to need higher and higher doses to achieve the same subjective effects. However, the damage incurred also increases as well; when a person with a high tolerance seeks alcohol’s intoxicating effects, he may inadvertently drink more than his body and brain can handle.

In contrast, **people that are new to drinking may not know their own limits** when it comes to drinking, leading to excessive consumption and increased risk of alcohol poisoning. Trying to keep up with other drinkers or to drink more in order to seem “cool” can lead to over-consumption and dangerously high levels of alcohol in the body.

**Binge drinking** is another risk factor for alcohol overdose. Binge drinking is defined as consuming enough alcohol to raise the body’s blood alcohol concentration (BAC) above 0.08%—generally 4 drinks within 2 hours for women and 5 drinks within 2 hours for men.

Even if it doesn’t meet the criteria to be defined as a binge, simply **drinking quickly** can also increase overdose risk. On average, the human body can process one ounce of liquor (or one standard drink) every hour<sup>6</sup>. Drinking more than this in an hour will typically result in a state of subjective inebriation.

Some people drink much faster than this, consuming high quantities of alcohol in a short amount of time, as in the case of shots or drinking games. This leads to a rapid rise in the body's BAC, which can have very dangerous consequences for the drinker. Those whose rates of drinking outpaces the onset of the expected intoxicating effects may not be able to gauge just how much they have had to drink, and quickly find themselves in a situation of alcohol poisoning"

(Online: <https://drugabuse.com/library/alcohol-overdose/> ).

**The time between consumption and intoxication varies from person to person and depends on:**

- **Metabolic rate.**
- **How much they have eaten.**
- **Gender.**
- **Hormones.**
- **Racial differences in alcohol sensitivity**
- **Weight.**

If someone does not wait for the alcohol to be fully absorbed from the digestive tract into the circulation, where it may exert its effects, he may unwittingly consume a toxic dose.

(Online: <https://drugabuse.com/library/alcohol-overdose/> ).

**Critical Signs and Symptoms of an Alcohol Overdose**

- **Mental confusion, stupor, coma, or person cannot be roused**
- **Vomiting**
- **Seizures**
- **Slow breathing (fewer than eight breaths per minute)**
- **Irregular breathing (10 seconds or more between breaths)**
- **Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, paleness**

### **What Should I Do If I Suspect Someone Has Overdosed?**

- **Know the danger signals.**
- **Do not wait for all symptoms to be present.**
- **Be aware that a person who has passed out may die.**
- **If there is any suspicion of an alcohol overdose, call 911 for help. Don't try to guess the level of drunkenness.**

### **What Can Happen to Someone With an Alcohol Overdose That Goes Untreated?**

- **Victim chokes on his or her own vomit.**
- **Breathing slows, becomes irregular, or stops.**
- **Heart beats irregularly or stops.**
- **Hypothermia (low body temperature).**
- **Hypoglycemia (too little blood sugar) leads to seizures.**
- **Untreated severe dehydration from vomiting can cause seizures, permanent brain damage, or death.**

Even if the victim lives, an alcohol overdose can lead to irreversible brain damage. Rapid binge drinking is especially dangerous because the victim can ingest a fatal dose before becoming unconscious.

(College Drinking- Changing the Culture. Online:

<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/parentsandstudents/students/factsheets/factsaboutalcoholpoisoning.aspx> )

### **What to do if you think someone has overdosed**

**WAKE – Wake the person (Try to wake or arouse the person)**

**TURN – Turn them on their side to prevent choking or drowning**

**CALL – Call for emergency medical assistance**

**STAY – Stay with the person until paramedics arrive**

## **CAMPUS RESOURCES**

### **USM Health and Counseling Services**

207- 780-4050- Portland Counseling Office (Payson Smith)

207-780-5411-Gorham Health and Counseling Office (Upton)

207-780-4701- Portland Health Clinic (Sullivan Gym)

### **The Recovery Oriented Campus Center- The ROCC**

207- 228-8043- Portland - Peer Support-Top of Sullivan Gym

## **CRISIS SUPPORT**

**207- 774- HELP OR 774-4357- *Opportunity Alliance***

## **EMERGENCY**

**911 OR 207- 780-5211 - *USM Public Safety***

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### **For More Information:**

#### **Preventing an Opioid Overdose Tip Card**

Overdose Basics- International Overdose Awareness Day

<https://www.overdoseday.com/resources/overdose-basics/>

Risks for Relapse, Overdose and What You Can Do

<https://drugfree.org/article/relapse-overdose/>

What to do if your friend has overdosed- Reach Out.Com

<https://ie.reachout.com/inform-yourself/alcohol-drugs-and-addiction/drugs/what-to-do-if-your-friend-has-overdosed/>

Substance Abuse Trends in Maine State Epidemiological Profile 2017

<http://www.maine-seow.com/Documents/SEOW%20EpiProfile%202017%20FINAL%2009292017.pdf>

***For Comments on this, newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact:***

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