



INFOSHEET: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NALOXONE (NARCAN®) AND BUPRENORPHINE/NALOXONE (SUBOXONE®)?

WHAT IS NALOXONE OR NARCAN®?

Naloxone, also known as Narcan®, is a medication that blocks the effects of opioids (such as heroin, morphine, fentanyl, etc.) that can be used to temporarily reverse an opioid overdose. Naloxone is known as an opioid antagonist, a medication that blocks opiate receptors, therefore blocking the effects of the opioid. Naloxone is only used to reverse opioid overdoses and not to treat opioid addiction. It has no abuse potential. Naloxone gives concerned helpers a window of opportunity to save a life by providing extra time until emergency medical help arrives. Naloxone was recently delisted by Health Canada. This means individual provinces will be able to decide if and when naloxone should be available without a prescription. Two forms of naloxone are currently available in Canada; it is most commonly found in Take Home Naloxone Kits as an intramuscular injection (into the muscle of the arm, thigh or buttocks) or a nasal spray device (into the nose), which Health Canada has recently made available through temporary emergency access.

QUICK FACT

*NALOXONE OR NARCAN® IS USED TO REVERSE OPIOID OVERDOSES AND HAS NO ABUSE POTENTIAL.
BUPRENORPHINE/NALOXONE OR SUBOXONE® IS USED TO TREAT OPIOID ADDICTION.*

WHAT IS BUPRENORPHINE/NALOXONE OR SUBOXONE®?

Suboxone® is the registered trademark name of a combined formulation of two different medications, buprenorphine and naloxone. The main ingredient in Suboxone® is buprenorphine. Buprenorphine is an opioid medication (partial opioid agonist) used to treat people with opioid addiction. When taken as prescribed, the buprenorphine in Suboxone® treats addiction by treating withdrawal and cravings, so people can reduce or stop using other opioids like heroin, fentanyl or prescription opioids. Suboxone® is taken as a pill that dissolves under the tongue (sublingual). Suboxone also contains a small amount of naloxone, which has been added to reduce the risk of people injecting the medication instead of taking it orally as prescribed. When Suboxone® is taken orally, the naloxone is not absorbed and has no effect, and therapeutic effects of buprenorphine predominate. However, if someone tries to inject Suboxone®, the naloxone will block any euphoric effects or “high” of injected buprenorphine. In this case, naloxone simply acts as an opioid blocker and is only added to the formulation as a deterrent for people who might want to inject the medication. Suboxone® cannot be used to reverse an overdose.

What is the difference between naloxone (Narcan®) and buprenorphine/naloxone (Suboxone®)?
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