

How to access further support

If the person is not already accessing services, this could be a chance to find out about harm reduction and longer-term support that's right for them, such as medication assisted treatment, blood-borne virus testing, naloxone supply and injecting equipment provision. Being in treatment is a protective factor.

You can help them to look at options in their local area – our list of useful links is a good place to start.

Support is also available for you. Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs is a national charity which supports anyone affected by someone else's substance use. To find out more, visit sfad.org.uk



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Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) is a company limited by guarantee, registration no. 106295 with charitable status and is also a registered Scottish charity, registered SC 008075.

Useful links

- Find out more about Scottish Drugs Forum at: sdf.org.uk
- Delivered by Simon Community Scotland, **My Side** is a digital one stop shop for harm reduction, sexual health and mental health support. simonscotland.org/programme/by-my-side/
- The Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards are guidelines in Scotland for providing high-quality, accessible, and person-centred treatment for drug use. matstandards.co.uk
- **WithYou** offers a free webchat service, staffed by trained support workers. It is available 364 days a year, closing only on Christmas Day. wearewithyou.org.uk
- Get support from the **Chest, Heart, Stroke** advice line. chss.org.uk
- **The Resuscitation Council** offers peer support for witnesses and bystanders to CPR, as well as survivors. resus.org.uk
- Find out about the signs of overdose and get information on naloxone at stopthedeaths.com

Find out about other support



How to support someone after a near fatal overdose



Information on how to support a person after a near fatal opioid or depressant overdose

sdf.org.uk

stopthedeaths.com



What is an opioid or depressant overdose?

An overdose happens when someone takes more substances than their body can cope with. If the person becomes unconscious, this is the point of overdose. The central nervous system slows down, reducing breathing, and oxygen levels fall. As oxygen levels drop, the brain and heart can be affected within minutes.

An overdose can be fatal.

Recognising a suspected opioid or depressant overdose

- Unresponsive to any stimulation
- Pale skin
- Blue lips
- Shallow breathing
- Noisy rasping breaths or snoring
- Pinpoint pupils



What to do

1. Call 999.
2. Put the person in the recovery position or start CPR with rescue breaths if they're not breathing normally.
3. Give naloxone, if you have it.
4. Keep giving a single dose of naloxone every 2-3 minutes until breathing improves. Do not administer more than one dose at a time and do not give naloxone more quickly than 2-3 minutes between doses. This may increase the severity of opioid withdrawal and activate the person's stress response, leaving them feeling unsafe or overwhelmed.
5. If they come round, give them some space. It can be a distressing experience and having people too close by can increase feelings of anxiety and panic. People do not always feel comfortable being touched. Asking any other bystanders to also take a few steps back can be helpful.
6. Stay calm and explain what happened. It may take the person time to process that they have had a near fatal overdose. Reassure them help is coming.
7. Don't be concerned if the person still seems sedated or drowsy after naloxone has been administered. This is normal and to be expected.
8. Encourage the person to wait for the ambulance and go to hospital for a check-up. Remind them naloxone wears off in 20-30 minutes and they should feel better soon. Let them know using more opioids now is dangerous.

In the hours after a near fatal overdose

The person may feel tired, confused, or unwell. They may have injuries, memory loss, or trouble thinking clearly. There's a risk of re-overdose when naloxone wears off, especially if more drugs are taken.

Stay with them in a safe place and check their breathing and alertness. A near fatal overdose can be distressing. Being there to talk about what happened with them at their own pace can be helpful.

When to see a doctor

If the person doesn't see a paramedic or attend the hospital immediately, they may need to seek medical treatment in the days after the near fatal overdose. Look out for:

- **Confusion** – changes in thinking, memory and orientation that persist after the overdose.
 - **Burns** – overdoses near heat sources can cause burns. Any burn bigger than the size of a hand needs urgent treatment.
 - **Persistent pain or tingling in limbs** - lying unconscious can cut off blood supply to a limb.
 - **Hidden injuries or broken bones** caused by a fall.
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