

31 August 2022

KNOW THE SIGNS OF AN OVERDOSE

New data from the NSW Poisons Information Centre (NSWPIC) shows a 12 per cent increase in calls (1047) regarding illicit drug overdoses compared to the same point last year (935).

The number of calls is down from 2020 (1,128) but significantly higher than 2019 (835) pre pandemic.

So far this year, the Centre has received 1047 calls received about potential overdose from illicit substances, around 30 a week, with more than 40 per cent of these associated with a stimulant drug like methamphetamine (ice) or MDMA (ecstasy).

Genevieve Adamo, Senior Specialist in Poisons Information at NSWPIC, said knowing the signs of an overdose and how to act can save a life but warned an overdose can look different depending on what drugs or medications have been taken.

“Stimulant drugs, when taken in excess, can cause agitation, sweats, and tremors and can result in heart palpitations and seizures. Knowing the signs of an opioid overdose is also important, as quick action could save a life,” Ms Adamo said.

“Opioid overdose signs include drowsiness, loss of consciousness and slowed breathing. If left untreated these symptoms can be fatal. If someone is unconscious or not breathing, call Triple Zero (000) immediately or seek urgent medical attention.”

Naloxone is an easy-to-use medication to reverse opioid overdose. It is available without a prescription at many NSW community pharmacies, needle syringe programs, and the NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA).

“Anyone taking opioid pain medications in excess of the prescribed dose or opioids which are not prescribed should consider obtaining a supply of naloxone to reverse an overdose event. Family and friends should also learn how to use naloxone.”

Calls to the centre often reported additional, unexpected side effects due to unknown ingredients in counterfeit pills.

“Illicit substances are not standardised. They vary in strength or purity, and often contain unknown ingredients, which can cause unexpected, and potentially deadly, side effects,” Ms Adamo said.

The risks and harms of an overdose also increases when combined with alcohol.

If you suspect you, or someone you know, is experiencing an overdose, call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 for immediate advice. If the person is unconscious or not breathing, call Triple Zero (000).

August 31, International Overdose Awareness Day, is a day to remember those who have died from overdose and reflect on how we can make a difference. Deaths from overdose are preventable.