

31 August 2021

Overdose can happen to anyone

On International Overdose Awareness Day, the NSW Poisons Information Centre (NSWPIC) are reminding people that accidental overdoses can happen to anyone and to take care with medications.

In the last week the NSWPIC has referred 47 people to hospital following errors with their regular medication. This is one of the most common causes of accidental overdose.

“Medication errors are common in the community and often occur due to wrong dosage, double dosing or taking the wrong medication,” Genevieve Adamo, Senior Poisons Specialist in the NSW Poisons Information Centre said.

“These errors pose a serious overdose risk, particularly to the elderly and young children, and can result in impaired breathing, drowsiness, coma or in severe cases, even death but this is preventable”

“We urge people to read dosage instructions before taking medication and to keep medication stored in the original packaging to avoid confusion. All medications should also be stored safely out of reach of children,” Ms Adamo said.

Overdose caused by the combination of opioid pain relievers with regular medications and alcohol also account for a large number of calls, with NSWPIC receiving 63 calls related to this in the last week.

“Overdose from opioid pain relievers occurs when patients take more than the prescribed dose of these products or when combining these medications with other substances to try and get more of an effect, for example when treating pain or sleep.”

“This creates a potentially fatal cocktail which is why it is important that people learn to recognise the signs of opioid overdose early and know how to respond,” Ms Adamo said.

Signs of opioid overdose include drowsiness, loss of consciousness and slowed breathing. Anyone taking opioid pain medications or using street opioids should have the antidote, naloxone (Nyxoid) on hand to reverse these side effects, in case of an inadvertent overdose.

“Nyxoid is a nasal spray which delivers a safe and effective dose of naloxone to treat opioid overdose. It is easy to use so family and friends of people who use opioid drugs can and should be trained how to use it in case on an emergency,” Ms Adamo said.

Nyxoid is available at pharmacies without a prescription. If you or someone you know uses opioids talk to your pharmacist about having the antidote on hand. (More information via [NSW Health's Your Room](#)).

In the event of any poisoning or overdose, call the Poisons Information Centre on **13 11 26** for immediate advice.

If the person is unconscious or not breathing, call '000', even if naloxone is administered.