

# Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

Dear partner in school and higher ed emergency preparedness,

In October 2017, the President and acting Health and Human Services Secretary declared the opioid crisis a [nationwide public health emergency](#). Opioids can help in the management of certain types of pain, but they pose serious health, financial, and social consequences when misused. Prescription opioids can be misused or abused<sup>1</sup> by an individual who takes:

- another person's opioid prescription, even if it is to relieve their own pain;
- an opioid medication in ways other than prescribed, such as taking it more often, taking more than the prescribed dose, snorting or injecting the drug, or mixing it with alcohol or other drugs not described as safe by a doctor or pharmacist; or
- the opioid prescription to get high.<sup>2</sup>



An opioid use disorder or addiction is rare with short-term medical use, but longer-term use can lead to opioid dependence, tolerance, and possibly addiction.<sup>3</sup> One large dose of an opioid can slow or stop the breathing, leading to an overdose that can be fatal. Risks of overdose are increased when an opioid is taken with alcohol or sedatives.

According to the [Final Report of the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis](#):

In 2016, an estimated 239,000 adolescents aged 12 to 17 were current misusers of pain relievers (1.0% of adolescents) and 631,000 young adults aged 18 to 25 misused pain relievers in the past month (1.8% of young adults)...Among adolescents aged 12 to 17, 152,000 (0.6%) had a pain reliever use disorder in the past year, and 291,000 young adults aged 18 to 25 (0.8%) and 1.3 million adults aged 26 or older in 2016 (0.6%) had a pain reliever use disorder in the past year (p. 24).

Schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education (IHE) may find the threat of opioid misuse and abuse affects their population in several possible ways:

- Students may use or abuse opioids themselves, leading to issues with drug dependence, addiction, and even the potential for overdose;
- Parents and families of students may be dealing with addiction issues at home, with family members using or abusing opioids themselves (and parents and family members may be unaware that opioids they have in the home are being taken by their children);
- Teachers and other school staff may have opioid use or abuse issues;
- Use by any member of the school community might bring drugs physically to school grounds (and in some cases, lead to drug dealing on or around school property);
- Corollary issues that result from drug use and abuse might affect school members or the community as a whole, including property crimes, fighting, vandalism, the presence of weapons, presence of other drugs or alcohol, etc. affecting the overall safety of the environment, and students' sense of safety at school.

These and other potential issues that might arise from opioid misuse and abuse, with the status of the opioid crisis as a public health emergency, make it a threat that schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education may want to consider including as part of their comprehensive high-quality emergency operations plan (EOP).

The U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) and its Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center offer the below information on planning for opioid

emergencies, additional resources, and sample materials to help schools, school districts, and IHEs in their planning and preparedness efforts.

### What is the REMS TA Center?

*A source of free resources and support provided on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students to schools (public and private), school districts, IHEs, local and state education authorities, and other stakeholders to help create all-hazards EOPs and preparedness programs that address a variety of safety, security, and emergency management issues. Support is provided for all aspects of preparedness—including activities for before, during, and after an incident—for components such as the social, emotional and behavioral; academics; physical and structural; and business functions of educational entities. For more information and resources, visit <http://rems.ed.gov>.*

### Key Terms

Several important drug and opioid-related terms and definitions are:

- **Opioids** are a class of drug prescribed by doctors to treat moderate to severe pain. Common types of opioids are oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine, and methadone.<sup>4</sup>
- **Fentanyl** is a synthetic (i.e., created by artificial chemicals) opioid, which is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.<sup>5</sup>
- **Naloxone** is a medication that can quickly reverse an opioid overdose by restoring the normal respiration of a person whose breathing has slowed or stopped. The drug is an opioid antagonist, which means it binds to opioid receptors and can reverse and block the effects of other opioids. Naloxone can be given by injection, autoinjection via an [Evzio](#) device, or prepackaged [Narcan](#) nasal spray.<sup>6</sup>

### Planning for Opioid Misuse Emergencies

The [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans \(School Guide\)](#) and [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education \(IHE Guide\)](#) were developed in partnership with six Federal agencies with roles and responsibilities in emergency preparedness, including the U.S. Departments of Education; Justice; led by the Federal Bureau of Investigations; Homeland Security, led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency; and Health and Human Services. The Guides provide a recommended six-step planning process that is cyclical and ongoing to help schools and IHEs create, review, or revise a high-quality EOP or component(s) of one. When developing activities, programs, and services to address the threat of opioid abuse or misuse, a school, school district, or IHE planning team can progress through the six steps as follows.

#### SIX-STEP PLANNING PROCESS

- **Step 1:** Form a collaborative planning team.
- **Step 2:** Understand the situation.
- **Step 3:** Determine goals and objectives.
- **Step 4:** Plan development (identify courses of action).
- **Step 5:** Plan preparation, review, and approval.
- **Step 6:** Plan implementation and maintenance.

**Step 1: Form a collaborative planning team.** The planning team will likely comprise a core planning team, school/school district/IHE personnel, and community partners. To address opioid abuse or misuse, the planning team can seek the additional input of individuals who have expertise in treating opioid overdoses directly, those with experience in treating drug or alcohol addiction, including opioids, and those with expertise in public

health (including public health emergencies or public health campaigns). These may include campus health service providers or school nurses, first responders (including local/campus law enforcement, fire department, and emergency

medical services [EMS]), occupational safety experts, public health professionals, emergency management, and [Drug-Free Communities Support Program](#) grantees, among others. This will enable the collaborative planning team to have the expertise needed to plan for opioid emergencies, such as overdose events, as well as to develop prevention strategies for misuse and abuse throughout the community. For guidance and suggestions on partnering with stakeholders in emergency preparedness, in general, see the OSHA and REMS TA Center resource [Collaboration: Key to a Successful Partnership](#).

**Step 2: Understand the situation.** Here, the planning team identifies threats and hazards to the whole school/higher ed community using a variety of assessment tools, assesses those risks, and prioritizes them for inclusion in the EOP. A planning team may be able to assess the extent of opioid misuse and abuse within their school community, and beyond, through several methods. Many schools and districts administer annual or biennial student surveys that include questions on drug use and can yield data to help inform an understanding of the prevalence of use at a site (e.g., the [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#)). Other issues that may arise in a school community due to a culture of prevalent drug use, as mentioned above – such as fighting, property crimes, weapons on campus – and their effects on student and staff perceptions of safety can be measured through assessments of school climate and culture. ED provides several [School Climate Surveys](#) which measure three domains of engagement, safety (including drug use in general), and the environment. Surveys are available for middle and high school students, instructional staff, non-instructional staff, and parents/guardians, and can be adapted for the higher ed community. Community partners and representatives on the planning team with expertise may also be able to contribute community-wide data about opioid use prevalence rates, which can help inform the extent of the problem within the school community.

**Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives.** After assessing the level of risk posed by threats and hazards, the planning team determines goals and objectives to achieve the best outcome for before, during, and after an incident. For example, when developing goals for addressing opioid abuse or misuse, three of them may be:

- **Before:** Prevent opioid abuse or misuse from occurring.
- **During:** Provide support to individuals abusing or misusing opioids.
- **After:** Offer recovery support to individuals affected by opioid abuse or misuse.

Using the goal of preventing opioid abuse or misuse from occurring as an example, possible objectives could include:

- **Objective 1.1:** Foster a positive school/campus climate.
- **Objective 1.2:** Educate parents on the potential for children to misuse opioids, and how to properly store and dispose of their own prescription drugs to help prevent youth from accessing them.
- **Objective 1.3:** Teach first responders and health services how to respond to a possible opioid overdose.

**Step 4: Plan Development.** In this step, the planning team identifies courses of action for accomplishing each of the previously identified objectives to address the what, who, when, where, why, and how. For example, the planning team may address “Objective 1.1: Foster a positive school/campus climate” by determining how often a Culture and Climate Assessment would be conducted, how it would be conducted, and who is responsible for conducting the survey; analyzing the results; and using the data to help implement school climate improvements.

**Step 5: Plan preparation, review, and approval.** Next, a draft EOP is written and circulated to obtain feedback from those responsible for implementing the document. Edits are made based on those comments, and approval is obtained from the appropriate leadership. School, school district, and higher ed planning teams have the flexibility to include information within their EOP that best meets the needs of the school/IHE and community partners who play a role in implementing the plan. Teams may choose to include opioid-related goals, objectives, and courses of action in an annex to the EOP such as an Alcohol/Drug Overdose Annex. Cross-cutting goals, objectives, and courses of action that could apply to a variety of medical emergencies could be included in a Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex.

**Step 6: Plan implementation and maintenance.** The EOP is maintained via regular reviews and revised when needed. Further, individuals with roles outlined in the EOP are trained in their responsibilities, and exercises are also conducted to test the ability of the school, school district, or IHE to respond to a threat or hazard. As a threat such as the opioid crisis

changes (e.g., by the population most affected, or the types of drugs most prevalent), planning teams may need to update their plans accordingly.

### Opium-Related Preparedness Activities

As school, school district, and higher ed preparedness is comprised of five mission areas (for more information, see the archived OSHA and REMS TA Center Webinar [Using the Five Preparedness Missions to Help Ready Your District and School for Emergencies](#) and fact sheets on [prevention](#), [protection](#), [mitigation](#), [response](#) and [recovery](#)), an awareness of each mission area, and what activities can be conducted under each area, can help stimulate ideas for what goals, objectives, and courses of action (see steps 3 and 4 above) are needed to create a comprehensive EOP. If the planning team decides that opioid abuse or misuse is a threat that needs to be addressed, members may want to consider the following activities that fall under the mission areas:



- **Prevention** is defined as the actions schools, school districts, and IHEs take to stop an event from occurring.
  - Work with community partners to identify prevention efforts that are universal (targeting a group or population), selective (targeting risk factors among high-risk groups), and indicated (targeting individuals who show signs of being at risk for a substance use disorder). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides more [information](#) on this topic.
  - Foster a positive school/higher ed climate that discourages the use of illicit drugs and where students, teachers, staff, and faculty are comfortable seeking treatment and support options for themselves and others.
  - Incorporate opioid abuse/misuse prevention strategies into health education and behavioral health programs.
- **Protection** is the ongoing actions schools, school districts, and IHEs take to safeguard the school/school district/IHE, students, teachers, faculty and staff from an emergency event.
  - Educate the whole school, school district, or IHE community with the support of trained professionals such as the school nurse, on-campus health providers, counselors, and community partners (e.g., local public health authority and EMS). Provide information and training to:
    - Teachers, faculty, and staff—including athletic coaches and trainers and residential directors—on identifying risk signs of opioid misuse, early intervention strategies for those with environmental and risk factors, and where individuals who have abused opioids and their families can go for counseling, substance use treatment, and recovery support.
    - First responders and health department staff on administering Naloxone, when allowed by law. Due to the potency of Fentanyl, an overdose is possible by anyone accidentally coming into contact with the drug. First responders should therefore be informed about [Fentanyl Safety Recommendations](#) to help prevent an accidental overdose before or after exposure to the opioid.
    - Parents and guardians on the dangers of drug use, how to help prevent opioid misuse or abuse, and treatment options. Resources that can help include a [Growing up Drug-Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention](#) publication, a [Parent Toolkit](#), and a [Facts on Teen Drug Use](#) Web page.
    - Middle school, high school, and higher ed students, and especially student athletes who may be prescribed opioid pain relievers by their doctor for a sports-related injury, about the risks of opioid misuse and abuse and how to safely and effectively treat or control pain. Classroom resources for middle schools and high schools are available [here](#) and resources specific to teens can be accessed [here](#).
  - Establish with community partners protocols to monitor the inventory, storage, and use of opioid

antagonists that comply with state and local laws and regulations with local public health officials and general counsel. This includes identifying roles and responsibilities of responders. For schools, this could be the school nurse; for IHEs, this could be health care providers and campus law enforcement, if permitted by local and state law.

- **Mitigation** is the actions schools, school districts, and IHEs take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life, injuries, and property damage from an emergency.
  - Implement evidence-based screening tools, such as [Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment](#), for trained staff to identify the severity of substance use by middle school, high school, and higher ed students and the appropriate treatment. Additional evidence-based substance use and mental health interventions are listed in the [National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices](#).
  - Ensure teachers, faculty, staff, and students know the [signs of drug use and addiction](#) and where to go for help for themselves or others.
  - Identify, with general counsel, and inform the school community about state Good Samaritan laws that provide immunity from arrest, charge, or prosecution for certain drug offenses for a person experiencing an overdose—or witnessing another person experiencing an overdose—who seeks medical attention. Additional information is available from the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#).
- **Response** is putting the emergency plans of the school, school district, or IHE into place to effectively respond to an emergency event, and provide for the immediate needs of students and staff.
  - Identify how responders would be notified of an emergency and how an opioid antagonist would be administered to reverse a suspected opioid overdose.
  - Identify how the privacy of an individual experiencing an overdose would be ensured through, for example, requiring students in the vicinity to return to their classrooms.
- **Recovery** is teaming with community partners to assist students, teachers, faculty, and staff in the healing process, and restore a healthy and safe learning environment following an emergency event.
  - Provide tailored support and services for recovery from addiction or an overdose, including (when appropriate) medication, individual or group counseling, drug screening, and other treatment. Some IHEs have established collegiate recovery programs, such as those provided by the [University of Michigan](#) and [University of North Texas](#), to help students recover from drug or alcohol problems. More information is also available in a SAMHSA [Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit](#).

### Additional Resources

OSHS and the REMS TA Center identified the following resources that provide additional information on preventing drug abuse and misuse and opioid overdoses:

- [Naloxone in Schools Toolkit](#), National Association of School Nurses. This Web page provides several resources to help school nurses and others plan for and respond to opioid emergencies, such as sample protocols, reporting forms, and presentations. Users are required to create a free account to access the materials.
- [Opioid Overdose](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A variety of information and links to additional materials on opioids is available on this Web page, including how to reverse the effects of an overdose, information for patients on how to prevent opioid misuse, and promising state strategies to help prevent prescription drug overdose.
- [Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit](#), SAMHSA. Information is provided to groups such as first responders, community members, and prescribers in this online publication, such as steps to take if you suspect an overdose.
- [Opioids](#), National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). On this Web page, the NIDA describes opioids, provides data on recent trends on the prevalence of drugs, and related resources, such as articles, publications, and policy briefs.
- [Substance Abuse Facilities Data](#), SAMHSA. This Web page lists Federal, state, and local government facilities and private facilities that provide substance abuse treatment services.

## Sample Materials

- [Guidelines for Responding to an Opioid-Related Overdose at School](#), State of Michigan. This addendum to a model policy and guidelines for administering medications to students focuses on the legal framework for administering medicine, school board opioid antagonist information, training requirements for individuals designated to administer an antagonist, and storage requirements.
- [Health and Opioid Prevention Education \(HOPE\)](#), Ohio Department of Education. The HOPE curriculum is designed to provide K-12 school students with the knowledge, attitude, and skills to prevent drug abuse. Materials include lesson plans, assessments, instructional materials, and guides.
- [Heroin Abuse Prevention](#), The State University of New York. Educational materials (e.g., student handouts and posters) are provided on this Web page, as well as information on Naloxone training, campus resources, and department of health regulations.
- [Naloxone Administration in Schools](#), Warwick School District, PA. This policy document provides guidelines for the training of employees, storage and administration of Naloxone, indemnification, and parental notification.
- [Naloxone](#), Lebanon School District, PA. Included in this policy document is the authority for administering Naloxone, delegation of responsibility, and guidelines.

We hope that you find the information above helpful as you support the work of your school or higher ed communities. Please do not hesitate to contact the REMS TA Center with any additional questions on the resources described. For additional information and materials on school and IHE preparedness, including safety, security, and emergency management, individuals can visit the REMS TA Center [Website](#) or call us toll-free at 1-855-781-REMS [7367].

Sincerely,  
The REMS TA Center Team

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## Notes

- 1 According to the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, drug misuse occurs when an individual uses drugs but not according to directions from their health care providers (e.g., taking two pills a day when they've been told to take only one). Drug abuse occurs when an individual takes drugs to get a euphoric response.
- 2 "Prescription Pain Medications." National Institute on Drug Abuse. Retrieved from <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/prescription-pain-medications-opioids>
- 3 "Misuse of Prescription Drugs." National Institute on Drug Abuse. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/which-classes-prescription-drugs-are-commonly-misused>
- 4 "Opioid Basics." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/index.html>
- 5 "Fentanyl." CDC. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/fentanyl.html>
- 6 "Opioid Overdose Reversal with Naloxone (Narcan, Evzio)." National Institute on Drug Abuse. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/opioid-overdose-reversal-naloxone-narcan-evzio>



If you have questions or need additional assistance, please contact the REMS TA Center at  
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